

The STRENGTH
of the WEAK

CHAUNCEY C. HOTCHKISS



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THE STRENGTH OF THE WEAK

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THE STRENGTH OF THE WEAK

A Romance

By

CHAUNCEY C. HOTCHKISS

Author of Betsy Ross

In Defiance of the King, etc.



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D. Appleton and Company
1902

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TO
MY WIFE

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I.—THE SWOOP OF THE HAWK	I
II.—THE HOUSE OF CHATSWORTH	6
III.—THE VOYAGEUR	10
IV.—A LEGAL THIEF	20
V.—THE EXPLOSION	28
VI.—THE DUEL	43
VII.—A PRISONER	49
VIII.—THE SLOUGH OF DESPOND	63
IX.—THE CELLAR	71
X.—A FAIR EXCHANGE	81
XI.—IN THE CHÂTEAU	92
XII.—TEMPTED BY THE DEVIL	100
XIII.—AT BAY	106
XIV.—THE DEVIL CARES FOR HIS OWN	116
XV.—THE TURN OF THE TABLES	124
XVI.—JESSIE SPAULDING	130
XVII.—WOODCRAFT	134
XVIII.—THE BITER BITTEN	141
XIX.—IN THE DARK	148
XX.—THE FLIGHT	153
XXI.—IN THE WILDERNESS	160
XXII.—"HALTE LÀ"	169
XXIII.—GUESTS OR PRISONERS?	176
XXIV.—I HEAR NEWS	184
XXV.—SELF-DEFENCE	191

The Strength of the Weak

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXVI.—A BLOODLESS COMBAT	198
XXVII.—L'ANGUILLE	210
XXVIII.—LA CHEVELURE	217
XXIX.—A FRIEND IN NEED.	227
XXX.—THE FIGHT	238
XXXI.—FREE TO ACT	248
XXXII.—THROUGH THE FRENCH CAMP	258
XXXIII.—WE START	268
XXXIV.—SOUTHWARD	280
XXXV.—A RESPITE	290
XXXVI.—BESET	301
XXXVII.—THE PASS	309
XXXVIII.—THE FORT	317
XXXIX.—THE ATTACK	326
XL.—THE PASSING OF L'ANGUILLE	334
XLI.—THE TRACK OF THE ARMY	341
XLII.—BLOODY POND	348
XLIII.—THE MASSACRE	355
XLIV.—I WIN	359
XLV.—CONCLUSION	367

THE STRENGTH OF THE WEAK

CHAPTER I

THE SWOOP OF THE HAWK

IN front of the house and towards the river there is a sweep of land like an English lawn, with only a sprinkling of timber, which stops entirely before reaching the boat landing. And it was on this space, fair and level, called the "fighting sod," that we faced each other.

I can see the old man now: his tall and wasted figure erect, a scowl contracting his bushy eyebrows, while his upturned, snowy mustache made his face as stern as though he were on a duelling ground and I a veritable opponent. It was no child's play to him—nay, nor to me—these fencing lessons; for old Peyrotte was a strict master, or, rather, he hung fast to discipline; and even to me, whom he loved as his own child, when it came to the foils and he was drilling me, he was a martinet and as severe in points of the etiquette of a swordsman as in points of the "parade." In those hours I was no more than a recruit in the *corps de garde*, my early awkwardness reminding him of his past days in France, *le bon temps qui est passé*, he called them, when he made a soldier of a peasant before he was fairly out of *sabots*. And I live to thank him for his thoroughness.

Peyrotte had always been old to me; even my early memory giving him his white mustache brushed

The Strength of the Weak

sharply up at the ends, and my first recollection of him is of attacking him with his own great rapier, which I was forced to wield with both hands, while he, seated on a low stone to bring himself near my own height—or lack of it—parried my thrusts with a light stick. Even then he turned to my father, who was looking on, mightily amused, no doubt, and said:

“I will make a fencer of the lad some day, *mon camarade*. He will draw a brave sword for France.”

But I never drew sword for France.

What the relations were betwixt my father and Peyrotte I knew not. It came to me (as some things come to one without a remembrance of the source) that the old man was a native of Nantes, and had been an officer of the guard in the palace of the great Louis of hideous memory, who, for some fault, real or fancied, had exiled him from France. For myself, I knew him to be a master-at-arms, and the gentlest, most fiery, and withal as noble a nature (the noblest but one) as ere crossed my path. Very little of his past had I ever known, and nothing of his family, the failure of his fortunes, or the reason he had attached himself to our house. I had gathered, somehow, that he was related to my father's first wife; but he was not a man to be questioned on these matters, and his name cast no light on his pedigree.

“Aha, m'sieur! Why do you play your sword with an arm stiff and jointless?” he broke out. “Have I to tell you ten million times that you are no *Italien*? It is their fashion to fence with a straight elbow, and for that reason they cannot face a skilled Frenchman. Give thy elbow ease—bend it—bend it, m'sieur le seigneur; it will be better *en quarte*, or when you disengage, or *en glissade*. Ah, 'tis well! But thy elbow should be the hickory wand that springs. Thrust not with thy body and at arm's length. Play thy point,

The Swoop of the Hawk

m'sieur; play thy—so— By Saint Joseph, that *tierce* were well done; thou hast skinned my shoulder! Thou will come in time, m'sieur; thou will come in time. I will make a fencer of thee some day, *mon camarade*. Thou art awakening fast. *En garde!*”

But we had barely recrossed our steels when a canoe danced from behind the screen of trees at my back and made straight for the landing. I knew naught of it until I saw Peyrotte drop his point and gaze, and so I turned in time to mark the light vessel slide to the shore. In it were two French soldiers and two Indians of a tribe I knew not, and something else so huddled that it took a moment or more for me to find it a human being. And without ado they came ashore, as though the right was all their own, lifting the living bundle to the grass, where it sat bound and helpless, only moving with a swaying motion as though about to fall. But when they uncovered it I saw it was a girl, bound and gagged. It was a pitiful thing to see that small figure in such helpless straits; but when she was freed from her bonds and the gag removed, she looked about her with great brown eyes, then sent out a shriek with such strength and pity in it that the air was full of her distress. And then I saw a light-haired girl—a mere child; not more than twelve or fourteen years of age, though it was hard to tell how old she was. A wee thing and unformed, with a face so full of terror and suffering that all her comeliness had left her (if she had ever possessed any), except in her eyes, which were of that soft, appealing kind more often seen in helpless, dumb animals than in man or woman. At the cry, one of the Indians smote her across the mouth with a blow that knocked her backward to the grass on which she was sitting; whereat I, having come up, seemed to lose all sense of consequence, and drove my fist full into the face of the barbarian with a force that

The Strength of the Weak

sent him staggering against the soldier behind him. The devil in him flashed from his wicked eyes in a trice, and I saw the glint of his knife as he drew it; but Peyrotte stepped between us and raised his foil, buttoned as it was, as though to receive him, while I bent to the small maiden and lifted her from the ground; and it was an easy thing to do. At that her shrieks turned to sobbing, and she wound her little arms about my neck, clinging tightly, and crying in English: "Don't let them kill me; don't let them take me! O papa! I shall die! I shall die!" And then I knew I was holding an English maiden, a captive—the fruit of some raid against the English frontier.

And so it was; for presently, after a deal of talk in a dialect of which I had no understanding, though there were sprinkled throughout some vile oaths on the part of the Indians, and a fine flow of genuine French from Peyrotte, in which were a few royal curses, the trouble was quieted, and we got at the facts. There was nothing novel in them. A war party of whites and Indians had descended into the New Hampshire grants, going well-nigh to the colony of Massachusetts before they met with adventure worthy of their purposes. At Dummerston they had come upon the first organized resistance, and were forced to retreat; but, as a souvenir of the raid, had carried off this child of one of the outlying settlers, after killing her father and five or six of the inhabitants, though losing about a third of their own number. The landing had become necessary through a lack of provisions, the party being on its way to Fort Frontenac, at the foot of Ontario; and there the maiden was to await the coming of a French officer, who, somehow, held her at his disposal. No doubt the red-skins would have gladly been rid of her long since, with a golden scalp to hang at the belt of one of them; for she had given much trouble, the binding and gagging

The Swoop of the Hawk

having been resorted to as the only means of quieting her wild outcries and her struggles.

I had heard the like of such raids more than once, but things are never so strong as when they come home to us, and this wrought upon me strangely. Still was I without power to ease the child in her captivity or give her a grain of comfort, so I held my tongue to her about her probable future, though I feared I could scent tragedy in the end. And, indeed, tragedy came at last, though not in the way I thought; and as for the end, it is not yet, thank God. To lift a finger for her escape, or even express great sympathy too openly, would have been to run the whole house into certain danger. But I heartened the poor thing (or tried to) in English, which I trusted would not be understood by the others; and she was washed and fed at the château and quieted by my mother, and then, within the hour of her coming, she was off with her captors. Not a sound did she make at last, only sobbing; but it was heart-rending to see her stretch out her arms to me as the canoe shot away.

CHAPTER II

THE HOUSE OF CHATSWORTH

Now, this incident was barely out of my constant thoughts ere other matters happened to drive it completely into the background. And one was, the way we were singled out by the Quebec authorities for petty persecution. It might have been simply because we were English, at a time when English blood had an unwholesome flavour to a Frenchman, or because we were not Catholic (although my father had been). But, anyhow, though seigneuries all about us were unmolested by that colossal villain, the intendant, Bigot, we were being mulcted through his practice of taking our grain and all else he desired, by force of law, paying therefor a mere pittance; whereas, when we came to buy from him (as we were sometimes forced to do from our own necessities), we were robbed by the extravagance of his charges. Over all Canada his agents roved, living on the fat of the land and sparing not the poorest of the habitants, though they could count their store in but a dozen bushels.

The seigneuries were passed, as a rule, but, as I have said, for some reason we were pitched upon—probably because we had no power at court. It was robbery of both king and people, for some two-thirds of the profits of these transactions stuck to the fingers of Bigot and his familiar, Joseph Cadet. And they waxed rich, and were feared by Du Quesne (who was then governor), and were winked at by Vaudreuil, who afterward

The House of Chatsworth

showed himself to be the weakest-kneed man who ever graced the pseudo throne of New France.

It is true that the intendant and his fellows paid the penalty of their misdeeds years after ; but at the time of which I write Bigot was at the height of his power, being all but chief ruler of the whole of Canada ; and none would have dared gainsay him had he taken an entire harvest and paid only in promises.

I was a youth then, unfledged in the ways of the world ; lacking not the wit, but the opportunity, or, rather, taste for society at large, else I might have known more of the reason that compelled our house—the house of Chatsworth—into the background ; but I was not to know until the knowledge came like a cloud-burst ; and yet, though I made no complaint, had I been fairly dealt with, I would have known as a boy that which was vouchsafed me only when I had become a man, when only by the merest chance I escaped ruin from its having been withheld.

Like many a man of tardy maturity, I look back on childhood and even early youth, and events come out like dreams without continuity. But time rolled by until I was shocked into a sort of awakening by the murder of my father, who died at the hands of a man I knew naught of until years after. And old Peyrotte, who was with him, bore back the news and the remains of his master, together with something in the way of a writing that I had never been allowed to see. My father had gone to Quebec on a mission, and was there slain, but whether in a quarrel or in ambush (which latter might well have happened in those days) I was uninformed, being then but little more than a lad in years, and somewhat less in understanding.

I knew a foul thing had been done, and felt resentment in a boyish fashion ; but when I asked old Peyrotte why my father had been killed, and by whom, he only

The Strength of the Weak

swung his great hand over his white mustache and said he feared it was because he was an Englishman, and as for his slayer, he was doubtless a Frenchman; while for the Frenchman's name—well, *quien sabe*, which he said was Spanish and was an answer to many questions.

And that was the first reason I had for hating the French, but it was not the last.

I might have known that an English seigneur in the heart of New France was like a drone in a hive, a thing to be cast forth; but if my father, in his worldly wisdom, had not seen the danger, why should I? I knew there was a line laid like a bend sinister across my mother and myself on account of our religion. To the powers at Quebec our lack of fealty to the faith of the established church savoured of treason to the state. I knew that our influence in Quebec was as nothing, and I cared little for it, as I hated the place for the way it contradicted itself—in intent, a godly town, in effect, godless. I knew it and loathed it, and yet, through sheer timidity (or bashfulness, perhaps), lived in it for a whole winter and retained my innocence, thank God.

By the time I was twenty years of age I had seen enough of the heartless froth and glitter and court fashion, mingled with the deceit and broad crime, that marked the last days of the French *régime*, and had I not by this time become more than a merely accomplished swordsman, I would probably have been unable to note as much as I did or have had the opportunity to become disgusted. Once, indeed, I was called a *poule mouillée* (or, in good, sound English, a "milk-sop") by one of the swashbuckling *jeunesse dorée*, and the blow I struck him was followed by a challenge. The youth was disarmed at my first pass, and afterward had the grace to thank me for not killing him. There was no glory in it, for not a man of my acquaintance in the whole province dared cross buttonless steels with me,

The House of Chatsworth

and so I saw my fill of folly and escaped being broadly insulted again.

I had grown to be a comely youth, with a fair figure and the lusty health and strength born of the woods and waters and the crystal air of the winter, and I might have found favour and bettered the condition of our house had I pushed my way and been less of a homebody or less willing to ride others down for my own benefit. There were glances aplenty—and bold enough they were, too; but I was callow and—well, “*se la jeunesse savait*” is an old proverb fitting me at the time.

CHAPTER III

THE VOYAGEUR

WHEN my father became possessed of his Canadian estate he had seen enough of the politics of the day, and with his title to the seigneurie he claimed retirement from the turmoil and intrigue of the French court as a part of the reward for his services to France. Therefore, with a view to a rest, which he never obtained, he built a mansion, but in such a purely English fashion that the authorities at Quebec (who were envious, no doubt) found great fault with its style, holding that a man who had changed his allegiance had better follow the manners of the country to which he tendered his sword, or lay his honesty of purpose open to suspicion. And so, like the proverbial oven, the house was altered until it reached its present shape—that is, it became a pleasant jumble of architecture, full of corners and wandering halls and rooms, great and small, on the inside, and without, a wealth of chimneys and gable-ends and dormer windows cut into queer places, and was of no fashion whatever, or one with which all might be suited in spots. And my father chose the name of De Mantel, and so called the estate in honour of his first wife's husband, and his kinsman, that brave Chevalier De Mantel who came over with De Frontenac and did such good work in the wilderness in the early days of New France.

The Seigneurie De Mantel faced the waters of Lake St. Peter, which is a mere incidental widening of the St. Lawrence, the basin of the expansion being some

The Voyageur

four miles broad by nine or more in length, and broken by wooded islands east and west where the river enters and leaves it. From the landing-place in front of the house the islands to the west are fairly to be seen in clear weather, though even then they seem to float betwixt sky and water, the mirage twisting the distance, if the eye be held on them. And on this day of which I write my eye was being held on them until they blurred in the blinding glare of the sun, for I had seen a strange thing.

It was early in June and one of those mornings when the softness of nature, and the prospect, and the air make youth and health fairly drunk in the joy of mere living. For all that grew galloped in a mad excess of life; every tree and leaf and blade were whispering little messages to one another, with a fair south wind to carry them. The waves lapped against the land with a wonderful smoothness and delicacy as though giving a soft pat, like a lover, and with a voice that said plainly enough, "I am spring; I have come again and I love you."

And out from the islands, which seemed caught up a step towards heaven, I had marked a speck drop, or appear to, on to the bosom of the lake, and then creep in my direction. As it grew in size it turned out to be but a boat, or rather a canoe, and in it were two figures paddling slowly. Now there was nothing out of the common in this had this been all, but when the canoe had floated to within plain sight of me it took a turn sharply towards the shore, just above the point where the woods meet the water to the east of the house, and there, not three rods from dry land, the figures ceased paddling and fell to fighting, and so disappeared behind the tongue of the forest.

It took me but a moment to leap into the boat that was moored at my feet and row out that I might get a

The Strength of the Weak

further sight of them; and well it was that I did—well for me, I mean.

What I saw when I approached was apparently a log of wood (though I knew it to be the overturned canoe) with an Indian astride of it, bent double, as though having a hold of something in the water on the side towards me. I had hardly sighted him when the head of a white man appeared from beneath the surface, only to be grasped again by the Indian, who was plainly trying to push the owner under and hold him there. Now, I knew nothing of the rights of the quarrel, but I had always held a smothered hatred for red-skins of any tribe, and to see a man of my own colour deliberately murdered by one of them was more than I could stand. Being unarmed, there was but one thing for me to do, and that I did. Putting my strength to the oars, I rowed ahead with all force, casting my eyes over my shoulder that I might not miss my mark, and at full speed drove with a crash into the frail bark canoe, not only over-setting the barbarian astride it, but well-nigh cutting in two his light support. For the life of the man who was drowning I was none too soon, for as the red-skin lost his hold and disappeared into the lake his opponent came up with a heavy, helpless lurch, and began slowly to settle. Ere he was a foot below the surface I grasped him by the collar of his shirt, and with mighty exertion hauled him into the boat, though it was all I could do, and came dangerously near to capsizing the craft; then I turned to the Indian. He needed no attention of mine, however, for by the time I sighted him he was scrambling ashore, close to a great oak whose roots went into the water. Once there, he gave me a villainous backward look, and, like a shade, disappeared into the forest.

Glancing about to see if aught was afloat that might be saved, I at first saw nothing save the wreck of the

The Voyageur

canoe and two paddles, one of the latter being split as though from a heavy blow; but as I sat down to pull to land with my insensible passenger, I marked something black bobbing on the little waves. It proved to be a small leathern bottle closely corked with a bit of corn-cob; and nothing else to save being in sight, I cast it into the boat and then got to shore at the place the Indian had landed.

Here I hauled the unknown body to the grass. At first I rolled him without result, but presently the water gushed from his mouth as though from a spring, and after working for above an hour—for I dared not leave him for help—I had the satisfaction of seeing him breathe of his own accord, weakly enough, but life was there. Thinking then that the bottle I had recovered might contain liquor, I ran for it, but, upon shaking it, found it was empty of liquid, nothing answering to the shake but a faint sound as though a loose cork had found its way inside, and so I sat down by the man and chafed his hands again.

While I was doing this I took notice of his details for the first time. He was a young man—that is, not more than thirty years old, and perhaps less. His dress was a cross betwixt that of a barbarian and a habitant, being partly of woven stuff and partly of the dressed skin of the deer, with strips of loose fringe along the legs and sleeves. He wore no queue, but his wavy brown hair, now matted with the wet, hung nearly to his shoulders. It was plain to me that he was but a *coureur de bois*, or one of those Canadian voyageurs who pass their lives on the waters and in the woods of the wilderness. They are explorers, hunters, and traders in a small fashion; consorts of the Indians, and their equals, too, in cunning and wood-craft; knowing their language and their ways, and in many instances their equals if not their superiors in treachery and the love

The Strength of the Weak

for scalps; men without homes, education, or many morals; devils in war, I had heard, and drunkards in peace, I knew, for I had seen many a one of them at Three Rivers, where the tide ceases to rise and fall, and at Quebec. As I looked at him I thought I had done little for the world by keeping him in it and burdening the hospitality of the house, only comforting myself by the knowledge that I had acted as a Christian should.

Yet there was something about the face that was not repulsive—rather the contrary, in fact, for it differed from the coarse-featured and pimply countenances of the men of his ilk whom I had met; and when at last he slowly opened his eyes to mine, I was puzzled at the look they gave me, for I had seen them before, I thought. Certainly there was naught but gentleness, a measure of appeal, and a soft beauty in them, and I took to their owner at his first glance.

He was not long in coming around after he found his senses. Presently he moaned and shifted his hand in a loose way to his head, and then I saw the scalp had been gashed, though not deeply; but before I could examine it closely he turned, raised himself to his elbow, gave a mighty cough, and said in French, as if to himself: "*Mon Dieu!* It is plain I am born to be hanged, since water will not have me."

I was about to reply when he cast his eyes on me and asked quickly:

"What became of the red-skin and the——?" At that he stopped.

"Miles in the forest by this," I answered; "and you but slightly missed going in another direction, m'sieur."

He looked hard at me, his big brown eyes seeming to bore through me, and asked how it had all come about. I told him the story as shortly as I could, he continuing to hold me with his gaze as he sat and listened, coughing his lungs clear, shrugging his shoul-

The Voyageur

ders, and rubbing his wounded head as he pulled himself together. When I had done, he said :

“ You are no French dog ! ”

“ I am no dog of any breed,” I returned, with some warmth ; at which he smiled feebly, and, holding out his great hand, returned :

“ I know that. I know that. I would not be ungrateful. I mean you are not French by birth.”

“ No,” I replied. “ I am of English birth and breeding.”

“ I knew it by the twist of yer tongue,” he answered in English. “ Now, God be thanked that I was saved by one of my own blood, though 'tis a risk I run by saying it.”

“ Then you are not what you seem ? ” I answered in the same language.

“ Aye, lad, all I seem and more ; the victim of a treacherous Injun, who has gotten off with the apple o' me eye an' left all the tools o' my trade at the bottom of the lake—I mean my firearms an' the like. How deep is the water where ye pulled me out ? ”

“ Eight or ten feet—not more,” I answered ; “ and I think I could mark the spot.”

“ Come, then,” he said, with some vigour ; “ perhaps we can get them, and then I will speak more to yer satisfaction.”

With this he got to his feet with a spryness that made me marvel at his rapid recovery from a point close to death, though with a man of his litheness and cat-like tenacity of life it was no great wonder after all. He must have been just short of six feet tall as he stood in his moccasins, topping me four inches, while his breadth made me small by comparison, though even I am no pigmy.

Five steps brought us to the boat, which I had drawn up on the shore, and as I was pushing it off the

The Strength of the Weak

stranger's eye caught sight of the leathern bottle, which I had laid upon the seat. With a shout he jumped for it, gave it a shake, and thrust it into the bosom of his soaked blouse.

"Ah, lad, did ye rescue that?" he asked, with a fine smile, which showed a regular set of white teeth, lighting up his face. "Liquor is liquor in these parts, and so scarce wi' me that ye will pardon me for not sharing wi' ye."

"A poor dram you'll get from an empty bottle," said I. "It may be of value as a bottle, but not for the wine that's in it."

"How know ye that?" he asked, with something like a scowl.

"By trying it when you were in need of liquor," I returned.

To this he made no answer, though his brows relaxed. He let me scull him to where I thought his canoe had been overset, for the wreck itself was no mark, the wind having driven it ashore. Here he made no more ado than to lean over the side of the boat and plunge his head and shoulders beneath the surface of the water, holding himself thus for nigh a minute, or until I thought he was like to go half-drowned again. Then he pulled back and simply said that he saw his rifle sticking, muzzle down, in the ooze on the bottom, a trifle away from where we floated, and, with no preparation of any sort, he leaped over the side and disappeared. Presently he came up puffing and blowing. With one hand he swam to the boat, with the other he threw therein the firearm, about which were tangled the slings of his powder-horn and bullet-pouch; then he drew himself aboard with the greatest ease.

Now, all this interested me mightily, from his making no mention of, or even thanking me for, his nar-

The Voyageur

row escape from being drowned, to his scanning the bottom of the lake (which is simple enough when one knows how), and the easy recovery of his piece. Who the man was and from whence, I hoped to find out later without asking unmannerly questions, as he had said he would tell me more; but just then, as he sat himself astern, breathing a little hard from his late exertion, I was taken up by his air of perfect self-possession and the attractive and almost handsome look his face took on when he smiled.

And yet, withal, though I cannot describe it, there was a look of uneasiness about him, and I thought I might be getting at the cause when, as he was pouring the water from his gun and untangling the gear about it, he said:

"Ye have many parties passing up and down the river here, have ye not? I take it by yer rig that ye live hard by."

"I live just beyond this point," I answered, pulling towards the landing a quarter of a mile away. "As for parties, they come both by road and river."

"Any large ones—that is, with ladies and—and say officers?"

"Not lately—none within ten days," I answered, at which he fetched a long breath and fell into sober thought.

We drew slowly along only a few strokes from the lovely shore through the woods of which the sun went flashing here and there, and out from which came naught but the merry rustle of leaves and piping of the birds that had lately returned to us. As we fetched past this long tongue of woodland I noticed my companion's eyes grow wide, and instantly he said, though very quietly:

"Have ye aught against me, lad—I mean for being English?"

The Strength of the Weak

“Nay!” said I, heartily; but ere I could add a word, he said in French:

“And so—God bless King Louis; ’tis a bee in a wasp’s nest, I hope.” Then in English again: “Ye have done me one favour to-day, for which I yet have something to say. Do me another and stop rowing—there; now back the water that the boat may stand.”

I was surprised at his sudden request until I noticed how fixed was his gaze on something ahead, so I turned myself about. We had just come to a point where the landing lay clear before me, and there I marked a large boat, newly arrived, with a party stepping therefrom. They were in plain sight, though not near enough to permit me to mark features; but one was a French officer, as I knew from his white coat with its violet facings; three were soldiers, from their blue uniforms which bespoke the militia; two were civilians, and one was a woman. I say three were soldiers, though, by his dress, one of the three was but a half soldier, for he was only military in coat and chapeau. The crew of the batteau, in apparel something after the style of my companion, remained behind until the passengers had walked some distance towards the manor house, and then, with a deal of luggage, I thought, they followed.

I was not astonished at the sight. Ours being by all odds the most comfortable and commodious house between Three Rivers and Montreal, we had often been called upon to entertain parties, entirely unknown to us, for a day and even overnight, though it sadly upset the household. But policy alone compelled this, as it would have been dangerous to have done otherwise than welcome the traveller by road or river in this land where the door is never shut on a stranger.

As I returned my attention to the voyageur, I marked that he was trembling like the water about us, though his eyes were as fixed as those of a hound pointing his

The Voyageur

prey. Until the new arrivals had disappeared from sight he sat thus, and then he seemed to come to himself.

"'Tis the chill o' the river, lad; take no notice of it!" he said, drawing his hand across his eyes as though to clear his vision. "I wish mightily to thank ye for what ye have done this day, but I am not a man o' many words in either French or English. What house is yonder?"

"The manor-house of the Seigneury De Mantel," I answered.

"Aye! An' what calibre of a man is the seigneur? A dancer to Bigot an' Vaudreuil, doubtless."

"M'sieur, I am the seigneur, but I know not that I dance to any one," I returned, with some dignity. "My name is Chatsworth, and, having saved your life, I will show you my calibre by offering you the hospitality of my house."

His manner instantly changed from half good-will to plain coolness. "'Fore God, but I have had more than one escape!" he muttered, and then he spoke aloud. "M'sieur, you are an Englishman, perhaps, but you speak the language of our gracious king. Let us use that tongue. I am under a million obligations to you this day, but must add to them by accepting your offer. I have a broken head, am wet and hungry, and have been half-drowned. You will do me an additional favour to forget that I am English."

This was expressed in French, but in a manner and with an accent so different from that of men of his class that instantly there shot through me the suspicion that here was an English renegade against whom I should be upon guard. His question about passing parties containing ladies and officers and almost on the instant the arrival of one tallying with his description, was a matter of which I then thought nothing, but it had a mighty significance.

CHAPTER IV

A LEGAL THIEF

As we approached the house after landing, I marked Peyrotte coming rapidly around the east wing. To my companion there was probably nothing remarkable about the old soldier, but to me his actions and appearance showed he was disturbed, for his eyebrows were drawn together and his erstwhile straightened back and shoulders drooped as though he suddenly felt the weight of his years. As he came to us, he drew himself up and looked askant at the still dripping man who walked a pace or two behind me; then he bent and whispered: "M'sieur, Cadet and his crew are within. The madame wishes you at once."

The information of the advent of Cadet was enough to depress me, though only in a vague way did I understand the possibilities that might ensue. But much more depressing was the fact that my mother had sent for me, evidently in connection with the event. She had never done so before. She and Peyrotte had hitherto borne in silence the brunt of the family misfortunes, shielding me as though I were a weakling; and I had allowed it, carelessly or selfishly, as it might have been.

"What is to be done, Peyrotte?" I returned, with an inward sinking.

"If there is not more than the usual robbery to follow, God be thanked," he rejoined, without directly answering my almost tremulous question. "Who is

A Legal Thief

yonder fellow? One of the train—a dog of a voyageur?”

“Nay, Peyrotte! Have him looked to. I saved him from the lake two hours ago; see to his needs, and let him go or stay. I take him to be an Englishman, though he is ready enough with his French. I think it were well to beware of him.”

I left the two, and going at once to my mother's apartment (for an expressed desire from her was a command to me), I knocked at the door and entered. My mother was walking up and down the large room with distress plainly written on her handsome features. As I came up to her and saluted she dropped into a chair.

“Maurice, my son,” she began in English—for of French she had but half-mastery, never conversing therein with me—“make yourself as brave as possible to meet these people. Cadet is here. Has not Peyrotte told you? We are undone if we cannot conciliate that robber. What is about to happen? He usually sends to us in the fall. What brings him in person and at this time? And what mean the soldiers? O Maurice, I am but a woman—and discouraged—and helpless!”

“Be not in a panic, mother,” I returned, sick at heart to see her so dispirited, for, as a rule, she was sedately calm. “It may be but a passing visit and without business, the soldiers acting as guards only. The crops cannot be his aim thus early. Who is the lady with him?”

“Thé daughter of the officer, a Captain Dessonnier,” she answered, speaking rapidly. “They all carry a high hand—higher than ever; and the captain would have his daughter bestowed in the east tower room, with a soldier at her door for orders or for guard, I know not which. What motive has he for guarding his daughter in this house? Can it be—” she suddenly exclaimed, changing her tone—“can it be that Brad-

The Strength of the Weak

dock has already taken Fort Duquesne, and they fear us and would watch us, we being English?"

"Mother, we are under the protection of the French flag," I returned. "I know little of state matters, but there is no war declared betwixt France and England; of that I am certain. What is the colony of Virginia to us? And the fight is between it and France."

"It is sufficient pretext. They hate us, Maurice; they hate us and are ruining us. If it were but possible to get from here! Your father was murdered by them—by one of them. Oh, my son, were you more of a man of the world—older, experienced, and more self-reliant—that I might tell——"

She was interrupted by a knock, and a servant entered.

"Madame, monsieur le capitaine would have immediate quarters for his men," she said. "He says, 'Tell madame that I shall occupy the east tower, beneath the room of my daughter. My men will occupy the west tower.' Monsieur Cadet says that madame is to serve dinner at five o'clock. Madame, is it so?"

My mother looked at me aghast, while for the moment I could do nothing but stare in return, thunder-struck at the impudence of the message. Then something within me seemed to break and a strange feeling beset me. For the first time I realized my useless position in my own house, and saw, too, how pampered I had been—how irresponsible and boyish I appeared. I, a man grown, careless without being weak, busy only in the pleasure of living. It was no time to hesitate, and I saw that at this juncture I must take the matter before us on my own shoulders, for my mother, evidently stunned by the high-handed demand, remained silent.

"Let it be so, Joan," I replied. "It has been thus arranged. I had forgotten to attend to it." And I faced

A Legal Thief

the young woman, hoping the lie would not appear on my features. The girl gave a courtesy and withdrew, while I turned to my mother.

"Self-reliant, madame! I have never had a chance to be. You have been too tender of me; and withal, we have been strangers in nearly everything save love. You have never burdened me; you have never confided in me. I know no thought of yours, no wish, save that your son should be happy and the estate prosper. I have been poorly prepared. The fault is not all mine that I am unable to meet this situation; but the facts, as I see them, do not make our future hopeless. These French hate us, I know. If they ruin us, there is New York or Massachusetts peopled by those of our own blood, and where a career is possible and wealth not impossible. Can we not leave this place for a time—leave until this brawl blows over?"

My mother's face did not brighten. "Maurice, you have been but half taught," she answered. "You do not know, as I do, that every avenue of escape is closed against us; at least against you. And if it were possible to get away, what then? This is no brawl. War, formal or not, exists. The estate would be confiscated and you published as a traitor, for you are a French subject. Your title proves it. On English soil we would both be beggars, dependent on the charity of my uncle, for not a rood of land could you acquire."

The last statement fell on me like a bludgeon, first, because of the mere fact (for that it was a fact I nowise doubted, my mother being sponsor), and, second, because there must be some sinister reason for it—a reason the nature of which I could not conceive. I faltered a moment, but finally said:

"Madame, I inherit this seignury through the fact that my father, though an Englishman, owed his allegiance to France; but my father is dead. I was born

The Strength of the Weak

on English soil and am of English blood. Moreover, I am not a Catholic. Why, then, do you say——”

“You have given the reasons, my son,” my mother interrupted. “That is why they hate us here; that is why Cadet is in this house. What you say is true, but your sword belongs to France; your name, your existence, you owe to France. God help me, but your English name is stained, Maurice; your father was killed before he could clear it! You must still be for France; do you not see the end if you prove faithless?”

“The name of Chatsworth stained!” I exclaimed, feeling all the blood in my body surging to my face.

“By no act of dishonour, my son. Your father was a martyr to his political opinions. In the days of the first George he was opposed to the German succession. He flew to France to save his life, and served the young Louis XV, under the regency of Philippe d’Orléans. God forgive me for allowing you to be kept in such ignorance, my son. You know your father’s first wife was a French woman—the widow De Mantel—childless save for a profligate son by her first husband. It was through her that your father obtained his title to this seigneurie; and yet, Maurice, your father was a stout Englishman at heart; that is why he would have none but an English wife when he married again, and at the time of his death he was seeking to make peace with the English authorities; but a Stuart hater sat and still sits on the throne. Do you yet think that a warm welcome would await you—a Chatsworth—in the colonies? My uncle, Sir Peter Warren, owns vast estates along the Mohawk, and only by his charity might we be allowed a few acres in the wilderness. We have no other resource. Do you not see the end, my son?”

That my father had been an Englishman I knew, but, to my shame be it said, I had known so little of him, had felt his death so slightly, that I had never inquired how

A Legal Thief

he had come in possession of a French seignury, and the information had never been volunteered. I knew I was the child of his second marriage; that his first wife had been a French woman; but I did not know of the existence of a profligate stepson. There was nothing shocking in this information, for I had expected disclosures more material. I felt, however, all my honoured mother wished to convey—that circumstances bound us to the soil of Canada, and as an English youth with English instincts, I felt the gall of the chain. As for the name of Chatsworth, I felt equal to clearing it, did chance but offer, and as far as I in my youthful short-sightedness could penetrate, we had only the present situation to combat—the presence of Bigot's agent—and that was sufficient.

I was conscious of the intensity of my mother's gaze as she sat awaiting an answer to her last question, and putting aside a vague something which seemed to overshadow me, I said:

"Perhaps your fears as to Cadet are not well founded. I am not schooled in politics or policy, but it is plain that we must smooth our faces to that man and see what comes of it; it may not be so black as you think. There is no present need to speak of swords or fighting. When the time demands I trust I will not be found wanting; I will do my share."

"Under which king, Maurice?" she asked, anxiously. "Ah, we have drifted from the point! Come to me to-night. I will tell you something you know nothing of—I should have told you long ago."

I was about to ask her to what she referred, when again there came a knock on the door, and the same servant reappeared.

"Madame, m'sieur wishes to see madame in the saloon—M'sieur Cadet, madame," she said, with the stolid indifference of her class.

The Strength of the Weak

"You have delivered your message," I answered, promptly, and the woman retired. "I will see the man at once," I said, turning towards the door; but my mother laid a detaining hand on my arm.

"No, my son; it were policy I should meet him as he requested; he will hardly dare offer me an affront to my face. Go to Peyrotte, tell him what I have told you, and remember the altered hour for dinner. Above all, Maurice, be gracious when you meet these strangers, and forget not, for your own sake, that we are in the hands and at the mercy of a legal thief."

And so I left her. To say I was perplexed and troubled would be to say little of my feelings. I was becoming afraid besides. Not in fear of personal violence, for there seemed no need of that. It had come to me that the weight of the matter rested and should rest on my own shoulders, and neither could my mother nor Peyrotte lighten the burden. I knew not what blow was about to fall, but a presentiment of something sinister was in the atmosphere. It was shown by the air of authority used by Cadet and his officer, and this foreboding filled me with a fear of the unknown. My mother had told me nothing I should not have known long before, but her words had come to me with the suddenness of a frigid blast in summer, and with them had come an awakening—a sense of self and a feeling of defiance which springs from the uncrushed spirit of early manhood. How to meet the future was beyond me. I only knew that we must attempt to placate the bloodsucker then in the house and let time and consequences shape themselves thereafter. What we did not possess he could not take from us, and we might easily live lower than we were doing, though we had steadily fallen in style since my father's death.

It was with no light heart that I started to find Peyrotte. I was told he had gone to the granary, and so

A Legal Thief

followed, that I might get comfort from him, a wish which showed that the weakness of youth still had an abiding place within me. But he was not at the granary, and I returned to the house by way of the orchard. How mightily the day had changed. The sky was as clear, the breeze as warm, and the birds as full of riot as before, but it was all masked and seen afar, as though the joy of them belonged to another. As I arrived at the path leading by the barns I was surprised to come across the voyageur whom I had rescued and the man formerly described as the half-soldier. They were seated together on the grass talking rather more closely than newly met men are apt to do ; but they saluted me as I went my way, too full of my own troubles to give them more than a passing thought and gesture.

CHAPTER V

THE EXPLOSION

I HAD decked myself in all but court finery when I went to my mother's apartment to conduct her to our unwelcome guests. So far they had held aloof. My mother had regained her composure, and was the patrician from top to toe—from her powdered hair (white enough without powder) to the lowest hem of her stiff silken robe. I asked her the purport of Cadet's interview, and she answered that it was only on the matter of the bestowal of his valet, but that he had informed her his party expected to stop with us for a day or two, and that he did not care to be disturbed by other visitors in the interval. "Courteously enough expressed," she declared, "but brutal in the tone of authority. With all his ill-fitting politeness I can see behind him. I fear him and his errand whatever it may be. The man is a beast," she concluded.

I had never seen Cadet, for hitherto his business had been done by a subagent, but both he and the officer were in the great saloon as we entered. It was a noble room, designed for gaiety that had never taken place, and barren enough now in our failing fortunes. Cadet turned to us as we advanced: a broad-faced man, red and bloated; broad-bodied, and with thick, meaty hands, the fingers of which were covered with rings. He wore a black wig, an elegant silk coat and waistcoat, with small-clothes to match, and silk stockings; while the buckles of his shoes, for gorgeousness,

The Explosion

would have put to shame those of the king. Such was Cadet, the future Commissary-General of Canada, fellow of Bigot, the intendant, and companion of Vaudreuil, the Governor. God wot, what a trio! For all his finery, his former trade of butcher shot from his pig-like eyes, and his figure flavoured of the meat-shop.

His companion, Captain Dessonier, in dress seemed tame beside him. He wore what was apparently the same uniform in which he had arrived. In appearance he was every way the superior of Cadet, being fairly tall, well formed, and naturally well featured. But the beauty of a pair of fine violet eyes was destroyed by his furtive way of shifting his gaze, and his whole countenance was marred by a surly contraction of the brows, which looked to be habitual. In defiance of the fashion of those days, he wore beard and mustache, both soft, short, and untrained, while his hair was simply gathered behind and tied with a black ribbon. A close inspection showed a countenance marked by dissipation and that something which stamps the man of low morals. If I had been looking for softness of character I should have turned to his grosser companion rather than to this man who carried his hardness of heart and tenacity of purpose on his face. He was about forty years of age.

Under the conditions besetting me I studied both these men closely. In one I saw a man powerful in wealth and position, but with a weak side—weak from vanity, perhaps, which might be got at. A brute incapable of feeling except for himself, but good-natured enough, as the world goes, if fairly flattered. The other I quailed from. A man of thwarted ambition, bitter with mankind, wrapped in self-love and self-interest, without even the saving grace of passing smoothness. A man who would grind those in his power and be servile to those above him in wealth or station.

The Strength of the Weak

It may well be supposed that I was taking much to myself to pretend, with my inexperience, to judge, at a glance, of two such men of the world. I did not say to myself that I was reading them fairly, but it was thus they struck me, and perhaps intuition was my strongest point (it is with women and children), for I was hardly fledged as a man. Anyway, the sequel will show how far I went astray.

Cadet saluted with the air of one out of his element, who, wishing to conceal his shortcomings, overdoes his part, for his bow was as low and profound as though he played at mock servility; and mayhap he did. His companion barely inclined his head, muttering some worn compliment with a movement of his lips alone, for his teeth were closed as though it were an effort for him to part his jaws and speak clearly. His contempt for us, or his plain lack of breeding, was displayed in his turning his back after the exertion of greeting his host and hostess, and walking to the open window. It was evident that common politeness was a burden to him, and my fear of him gave way to a lively dislike.

“M’sieur le Seigneur Chatsworth,” said the agent, after the first formal compliments, “it may please you to know that I am not upon the king’s service on this occasion—that is, not entirely—oh, no!—eh, captain?” Here he gave a smile that sent the fat wrinkles to his neck, and he softly rubbed his beefy hands together. “I—that is, *we*—have business in this quarter,” he continued, glancing towards the man at the window, “as you will soon be informed by m’sieur le capitaine, to whom I would advise you—” But he was cut short by the officer, who had seemingly been lost in admiration of the prospect without; for, wheeling about on his heel, he spoke almost fiercely, though with hardly a movement of his lips:

The Explosion

"M'sieur Cadet, you will oblige me by neglecting to refer to me or my affairs. Have you no sense? M'sieur and madame will be enlightened at my discretion—at the proper time."

Cadet appeared to be slightly embarrassed in being thus nipped short, but he passed it off with an awkward wave of his hand and made no reply.

The mighty relief which came over me on hearing that the visit of the purveyor of La Friponne was not directed against us made me think lightly of the remark of the officer, and caused a sharp rally of my spirits. Even so did it affect my mother, for the worry fell from her face as though she had removed a mask. I think that in our simplicity and gratitude we both might have made the mistake of thanking him, and thus have betrayed that which we most wished to conceal; but just then the door opened, and a servant announced that dinner was waiting.

"I do not see Mademoiselle Dessonier. Shall we not tarry for your daughter, m'sieur le capitaine?" asked my mother, as she placed her hand in the pudgy arm of Cadet, who had advanced with a flourish.

"My daughter will remain in her room, madame," came the reply, without change of voice or manner. "She has withdrawn from intercourse with society, being destined for a convent. She is journeying to Quebec for the purpose of retiring from the world."

"Ah! I had expected the pleasure of meeting her," said my mother, and turned away with her escort. I offered my arm to the captain, but he pretended not to notice it, and so, simply walking side by side, we followed the others to the dining-room.

This apartment was originally intended for a banquet-hall, but, like the saloon, it had never yet fulfilled its purpose. To my eyes it was an immense room, with a desert of unoccupied space about the table; though it

The Strength of the Weak

had not the barren look of its companion across the hall, for the casements were hung with heavy curtains, and there was a wealth of both rugs and fur robes scattered over the polished floor and on the carved benches against the wainscot. A huge fireplace half-filled one end of the room, and even now, though the windows stood open, a small fire was burning briskly therein, like a torch in a cavern. Over the broad, carved chimneypiece the glitter of rapiers, gun-barrels, pistols, and powder-horns, as well as masks and foils, showed that here was the armory of the household. The panelled walls and dark, thick rafters overhead gave the *salle-à-manger* a look of richness which was mighty satisfying to me, and it doubtless had some effect on the reticent officer by my side, for I marked his violet eye sweep over every detail of the apartment ere we had advanced half-way to the table.

This had been laid for six people, Peyrotte always dining with us, though he had not yet appeared; but, as Captain Dessonier's daughter had failed us, I placed Cadet at my right hand, in honour of his governmental position, and assigned the captain to a seat next my mother, thus leaving a vacant space on the right of either guest.

We had barely settled into place when the door opened and two men entered the room. One was he whom I had marked talking to the voyageur—the half-soldier. He marched in and stationed himself behind the chair of the officer, glancing neither to the right nor left, and holding himself as stiffly as though on parade, his military bearing being helped out by the sword belted to his waist. The other was the second civilian—Cadet's valet—of whom I had heard and seen nothing since leaving the boat. He was a short, fishy-eyed man, a small pattern of Cadet himself, dressed in a snuff-coloured suit throughout, unmilitary in bearing, un-

The Explosion

savoury and cringing in appearance. As silently as his fellow he took his place behind the chair of the agent, and remained immovable.

It was doubtless a prearranged act, as neither of the guests looked up, apologized for the intrusion, or seemed to notice the unusual proceeding. I confess that I knew not how to take this matter. It struck me that I might have fallen behind in the manners of the day, and to protest the uselessness of an extra and private servant might be to expose my ignorance of a possible new feature in court etiquette. It was evident that my mother was equally at a loss, for her eyes roved from the men to their masters and to me, half in question and half in indignation, while I could do nothing in return but appear as unconcerned as though it were a matter of every-day occurrence.

But if this incident gave me surprise, another followed hard upon it and cast it into the shade. It caused me to widen my eyes, though I allowed no other sign to escape me. Barely had the new arrivals taken their stations and the first shock of their appearance passed, when the door of the pantry opened, and Peyrotte, whom I had not seen since early morning, strode into the room. To me he was an astonishing sight. Clad in the full uniform of an officer or a soldier (I knew not which) of the Royal Guard or Musketeers of the old Court of Louis XV, he advanced across the saloon, his side-arms and spurs clinking to his step, as handsome a specimen of the military arm as could be imagined. Without a word, a gesture, or a look, he placed himself behind my mother's chair, as though it were a regular duty. His face was a study, but I dared not study it. I looked at my mother, and her countenance showed how completely she had been taken aback, though to all but myself she still held a calm exterior. Cadet glanced at the tall and martial figure in open

The Strength of the Weak

admiration, while the captain stiffened and turned red from having been plainly beaten at his own game. What it all meant, I knew not. I felt as though an icicle had been dropped down my back, and for the moment forgot where I was. But a better head than mine was at work, for before the constraint of the company could become manifest, Peyrotte swung on his heel and called aloud, "Let the dinner be served," clapped his spurs together, and swung back to his original position.

Beyond this there was no ostentation. The meal was furnished in our usual informal fashion, and progressed smoothly enough, though the first of it well-nigh choked me. Wine was taken in the conventional manner of the day, common politeness demanding the compliment; but beyond an occasional reference to the weather, and once a remark anent the army of Braddock, of which the English colonies were expecting great things, and which was then preparing to invade the Ohio valley, nothing of consequence was said, though to me, as well as to my mother, the air was charged with something out of the common. It is true that once or twice Cadet attempted to make conversation; but, though his remarks were broadly jocular, they met with a frigid reception even from the captain, and at last he desisted and turned his sole attention to his plate. The agent was a man of more than generous appetite, and, like many another, he showed his breeding, or lack of it, by carrying his knife to his mouth more frequently than he did his fork.

With palpable restraint my mother did not once turn her head towards the old soldier behind her, and succeeded fairly well in appearing unconcerned at the somewhat threatening aspect of the situation; but I could read behind her calm exterior, and knew the inward heat and wonder and sense of thinly veiled insult that taxed her powers of self-control. As for myself, I took

The Explosion

notes of the features of the stanch retainer behind her (though they told me nothing), and my best support was the comfort of his presence there, albeit I understood nothing of his motive. Through it all neither Peyrotte nor the soldier nor the civilian shifted their statuesque postures, nor by so much as a glance did one appear to recognise the presence of the other.

It was an hour of strained nerves. It was a meal as solemn as though a death's head took the place of the epergne, and it had progressed from awkwardness to damnable torture by the time the last course was served. Whether or not the removal of the cloth was to be the signal for the commencement of the finale I cannot say, but I do know that it was then the officer, who appeared as nonchalant as ever, pushed aside his glass with the impatient air that marked all his actions, and as though he had awakened to the fact that he owed a word to his hostess, remarked:

"Madame, you have a fine estate here; is it held in *feoff* or *en roture*?"

"It is held by my son by inheritance from his father," was the answer.

"Ah, yes! And by General Chatsworth?"

"The title was conveyed to him by and in France, m'sieur. It was formerly held by the late Chevalier de Mantel, who died without issue."

"Without issue, madame?"

"As regards inheritance, yes, m'sieur. His only son was outlawed by the state."

This was but a repetition of what my mother had told me earlier in the day. I was not greatly interested in the conversation, save that anything, even triviality, was better than the silence which had become unbroken during the latter part of the meal. At my mother's answer the captain hesitated a moment, then, looking up with a scowl, said:

The Strength of the Weak

“Pardon a natural curiosity, madame. The son was outlawed—for what?”

My mother flushed slightly. “Some jewels, m’sieur, and—and a lady whose husband, though old, was not always blind. I was told that the young man lacked the wit necessary to make a successful—shall we say scoundrel? The husband of the lady was powerful at court, the Bastille yawned, and the culprit fled just as a decree of outlawry was issued against him. I believe that even his mother did not regret him, and certainly there was no love lost between him and his stepfather, my late husband.”

For a fraction of a second I saw a glance flash betwixt the captain and the agent, who seemed greatly interested in the conversation. The latter smiled feebly; the captain made no remark, but reaching for the decanter, refilled his glass and coughed slightly. Presently he said, with an air that flavoured of authority and with a hard set to his jaws:

“And the name of the outlaw, madame?”

This unusual catechism and the way it was being conducted was becoming little to my mother’s taste, but it was a welcome change from the previous tension, and she held herself with dignity as she answered:

“Armand, m’sieur capitaine.”

“It is the same,” remarked the officer, half-aloud and half to himself. “And would you not consider the title rather—rather clumsy in the event of that gentleman obtaining a pardon? I suggest it to you. In fact, I am acquainted with M’sieur de Mantel—a greatly misunderstood man—the victim of appearances and spite. He still lives and—and I am really speaking in his behalf. Pardons are very apt to result in a rebestowal of old interests and estates, madame.”

“I cannot consider such injustice possible,” returned my mother, rising with hauteur, though she had turned

The Explosion

as pale as death. "Gentlemen, I will leave you to your wine; excuse me. Maurice, my son, your arm."

Unready as I had usually been to disconnect an innocent exterior with innocence itself, this conversation, short as it was, had plainly been a pointed one, and, even to me, appeared to have been led to an offensive end. My eye first fell on Cadet. He was smiling broadly, his heavy, uneven teeth showing like fangs. Peyrotte looked like a graven image, giving me not the slightest encouragement, and the only two who appeared to be particularly interested were my mother and the officer. My mother had risen to her feet and taken a step towards me before I could gather my wits and go to her assistance; but ere I had moved half around the table, the captain interposed.

"Monsieur Chatsworth, you will do well——"

"Monsieur le *seigneur*—Captain Dessonier—" I interrupted. "You forget yourself, sir!"

"Monsieur Chatsworth," he repeated, without apparent notice of my correction, "you will do well to insist on your mother remaining here."

The blood left my heart in a flood, and passing the fellow and the soldier at his back, I offered my arm to my mother, and escorted her to the door. In the few steps I walked to reach it a thousand emotions thronged upon me, and for aught I can tell, it was my boyhood taking flight. For when I had bowed my mother from the room and returned towards the table, I was a man in spirit as well as in years, and was prepared to meet these interlopers with as ready a wit as they themselves possessed. I became fully alive. I was not only in the world, but of it. There were sparks dancing before my eyes, but I know I appeared clam enough; nor was I in the least surprised to find that Peyrotte had left his place and stationed himself behind my vacant chair.

The Strength of the Weak

I was not expecting to find the officer crestfallen at my plainly ignoring his last suggestion, which was really a command in the manner and spirit with which it was put; but if I had been, I should have felt disappointed. He sat in an easy, half-lounging, and thoroughly careless position in his chair, twisting a wine-glass by its slender stem, seemingly absorbed in thought. But as I reseated myself in a decidedly aggressive spirit, he looked up and said:

"I did not intend being offensive, m'sieur, but the case is an interesting one both to madame and yourself."

"And to M'sieur Armand de Mantel, who has evidently found a champion," I ventured, my temper getting somewhat the better of my discretion.

"And to M'sieur Armand de Mantel," he repeated after me, without glancing up, though I saw his eyelids twitch spasmodically. "And, moreover, m'sieur, I will be brief and inform you that that gentleman *has* received his pardon from the king, and *has* been promised reinstatement into his rights of inheritance. Your pardon, one moment," he said, as he shot a swift look at me and saw I was about to speak. "It may appear to you as an injustice to yourself and family, but it is law if the king will so have it; and to avoid scandal or other possible unpleasantness, through me M'sieur Armand has seen fit to advance this proposition, which is given somewhat abruptly owing to the spirit you have chosen to show." He stopped and looked at Cadet, who simply stared back at him.

"And the proposition, m'sieur!" I demanded, leaning forward.

"Is that on the proclamation of his rights you quietly resign the estate. Of course some provision might be made to repay you to a certain, or, I should say, uncertain extent; but the consideration of secrecy and the resignation in the form of a sale would go far to deceive

The Explosion

the public at large. Nothing can be promised, however, though much might be performed."

I think nothing could have astonished me at this juncture, for even the maddening calmness and gross impudence of this man and his proposition for me voluntarily to ruin myself, did not. I only felt a stricture of the throat, and realized that I must by no means lose control of myself before these two villains. Therefore I listened quietly until he had finished, settled back in my chair, and, with an effort, answered in a voice as even as his own:

"I shall resign nothing, Captain Dessonier. I am protected by the flag of France, and have never been accused of disloyalty. Whatever the king may be, he is not a villain."

"The king is in France, m'sieur; but possibly he knows that one of his subjects holding a seigneurial estate in Canada has not complied with the law and drawn his sword, though war exists. You are aware of the obligations of a seigneur, doubtless."

"My obligations are those of a private citizen until war is declared between the quarrelling nations, or there be a call to arms, neither of which has yet come to pass. When they do, I will fight."

He raised his head slowly, and for the first time looked me squarely in the eye.

"Under which king, m'sieur?"

"I might make your words appear as an insult, Captain Dessonier," I returned somewhat hotly, for I was taken aback at the direct question—the same my mother had asked a few hours before. "But you are beside the point and begging the question. We were speaking of the estate."

"And there are other matters," he continued, ignoring his own question as well as my answer. "Your father, as is well known, was on the eve of a reconcilia-

The Strength of the Weak

tion with the English authorities at the time of his death. There are many——”

“At the time of his *murder!*” came the deep voice of Peyrotte at my back. The officer started visibly and looked up at the old soldier, but before he could frame a word in continuance, Peyrotte again spoke.

“Ask him, m’sieur le seigneur, if the king would transfer the rights of an established seigneurie to the hands of a cowardly assassin.”

There was no need for me to put the question. Captain Dessonier half-rose from his chair, but controlling himself, sank back, while Cadet gave an exclamation and set down the glass he was lifting to his lips.

“M’sieur Chatsworth,” blurted out the officer, “this is an unbearable accusation to be put upon an absent man before his friend. By what right is it made? Are there proofs?”

“Tell him there *are* proofs,” came from Peyrotte. “Tell him there is the statement, the dying statement, made by m’sieur le général himself, who knew and grappled with his murderer. Proofs attested by the priest who performed the last holy offices to the dying victim of Armand de Mantel. Proofs written by the failing hand of m’sieur le général, that here, in the presence of M’sieur Cadet, I hand to you, his son, who until this moment knew nothing of their existence. So guard them well, m’sieur le seigneur; so tell him to warn his friend, that he may save himself from the law, which shall soon know he is living, for until now I thought him dead. Is there more?”

The voice was as deep, as even, and profound as though it issued from a sepulchre. My hair seemed to move on my head as I slowly rose from my chair and confronted the old man. The officer and Cadet remained seated, either looking at the other. Peyrotte’s eyes, in which was an expression unknown to me,

The Explosion

were fixed on the officer ; nor did he move them as he unbuttoned his brilliant coat, thrust his hand into its breast-pocket, and brought out a roll of papers some three inches long and no thicker than a lady's cane. It seemed to burn my fingers as I touched it, but I took it from him and slipped it into my pocket.

Captain Dessonier was breathing hard now, though his well-schooled countenance betrayed no emotion, unless it appeared in the shifty eyes, which looked at me and away again, like a cat awaiting his chance to take his victim off guard. For a space no words were spoken, the only sound being Cadet's chair as he moved it uneasily on the floor. Evidently the game had received a check. At length the officer seemed to come to a conclusion, and there was a rasp to his voice as he spoke :

"I know nothing of these so-called proofs—worthless at best ; though were they good and trustworthy, it would not alter the case in the least. If De Mantel killed General Chatsworth, it was justifiable."

"You are speaking of my father, you hound !" I broke out in English.

There came a quick flash of his eye at my thoughtless change of tongue. It was a slip that really gave him an advantage over me, but, instead of making use of it, he failed to mark the opening given to him, and parted with his temper instead.

"I mean all I say, m'sieur," he answered with an abrupt change from the easy manner he could no longer maintain, for his voice came loudly and clearly from between his now parted jaws and his words were rapid enough. "Your father was first a traitor to England, and lastly a traitor to France. Resign your estate, m'sieur ; resign your estate, else I swear that scandal will follow and ruin you, m'sieur ; a scandal that will lay your mother low and humble your pride."

The Strength of the Weak

“Scandal touching my mother, you scoundrel!” I vociferated, bringing my hand to my hip where my sword should have hung.

“Aye, my ardent host, scandal, I repeat!” he returned, with a devilish smile that showed the gratification he felt at having moved me beyond control. “Let us be open. Have you proofs—you seem to be full of proofs—have you proofs of your mother’s marriage and your own legitimacy?”

The room swam in a red fog. Though my back was towards the fire, I saw it and the windows chase in a crimson circle around me. For an instant all changed to blackness, then again came light and reason, and a mighty sense of relief that my mother was not present.

“Almighty God be with me!” I exclaimed, staggering back and turning to Peyrotte. “Lend me your sword that I may kill this fellow who has polluted my house!”

But the old soldier laid his hand upon his rapier to keep it in its place, and, gently pressing me aside, took two or three strides towards the officer, whose smile was now as triumphant as Cadet’s was broad, and seizing a wine-glass, dashed its contents into the face of the offender.

CHAPTER VI

THE DUEL

I SAW the blood-red liquid run down the officer's beard and drip over his white coat. I saw the drops splash across the table and into the coarse countenance of Cadet, who, shocked by the unlooked-for attack, upset the wine-glass in front of him and pushed back his chair with such vigour that it caught in the rug and tipped, sending the agent sprawling on his back. As his servant bent to raise him, I saw Dessonier spring to his feet and Peyrotte step back without a word.

"Ten million devils!" shouted the infuriated officer, wiping his face with a napkin and then throwing the cloth violently from him. "M'sieur Chatsworth, draw your sword, that I may settle this insult done me in your house and by your servant. The coward knows I cannot fight him. My rapier, Felix."

"M'sieur, you *will* fight me—and me alone," interposed Peyrotte, with a dangerous calmness, the look in his eyes becoming more deadly than before. "I am an officer of France and your equal."

"Stand aside, you villain!" exclaimed Dessonier, with an oath and a complete abandonment of self-control as he took from his servant the rapier which the man had drawn from the sheath at his side. "*Thou* my equal! I know you not. I have been *en masque*. I am the Count de Lune, and at your service, M'sieur Chatsworth. Procure your sword; we will dispense with formalities."

The Strength of the Weak

“Right willingly, you reprobate, be your title what it may!” I shouted, as I ran across the room to the chimneypiece, elated at the chance to punish this fellow, as I had no doubt of being more than able to do. As I reached for my rapier, which hung in its place, I heard the voice of Peyrotte, as he raised it to a surprised shout:

“*Thou* the Count de Lune! And by what right?”

“What is it to thee, thou scum of the earth, thou beast; but for thy master, be it known that I am the count through the death of my uncle,” was the vehement answer. “Here, Felix, kill this man for me.”

“Thou liest!” roared Peyrotte in return. “If thy uncle be dead, I, even I am his successor. Your uncle being dead, my brother—your mother’s brother—is dead, and therefore I, Jean Peyrotte Bientot, am the Count de Lune. Exiled from France by the great Louis, thrice saved by General Chatsworth, I will protect the present seigneur and his name from you, impostor, whom I knew when you stepped ashore. Thou art my reprobate nephew. Thou art Armand de Mantel. Have I been blind? Not so. The honour of this house is mine own, and I will defend it. So I swore to my dead friend. Thou knowest now why I stand in this room to offset the villain yonder who bore your sword for you. Thou knowest now that not only art thou a thief, a ravisher, and a murderer, but that thou art no more than one of the *canaille*. Yet will I lay my pride behind me and give thee a last lesson. *En garde, m’sieur poltron.*”

These words, which were thundered at the officer, had a mighty effect on me. Peyrotte had laid his history bare. In a moment a matter of years had come to a head. While the old soldier spoke all in the room remained as though bound by a spell—all except the officer, who appeared to shrink and crouch like a cat,

The Duel

and whose eyes, losing their beauty, were half-closed and shone like a devil's. Hardly had Peyrotte spoken the last words, when Dessonier uttered a vile oath and sprang towards him, but he was received with admirable coolness and in good order.

I had turned, sword in hand, to listen to the last words of the old soldier, when I heard footsteps hurrying along the hall, the door of which I was near. Thinking first that my mother had been attracted by the loud voices, and, immediately after, that the soldiers without would interfere in a matter which I wished forced to a completion, I stepped quickly to the door and turned the key just as the latch was being tried. It was hardly done when De Mantel, who probably at once felt the superiority of his opponent, shouted to his servant: "Help here, Felix! For the king, for the king!" And I marked the half-soldier run to the mantel-piece and take down a sword. In an instant I divined his purpose, and was upon him ere he had more than time to throw himself into position and engage with me.

And now the clash of two sets of steel rang through the great room, but I heard no other sound, at least naught but one—the shriek of a servant, who appeared at the pantry door and at once fled. I gave too close attention to my opponent to shift my eye from his for a second; but it took but few passes to show me that he was not even an ordinary swordsman, and that his life was in my hands. But I could not take it. He was too clumsy in his lunges *in appel* (which is but a stamp to divert attention, followed by a thrust) for me to respect his powers, and to have run him through would have been deliberate murder. I had never then shed human blood, nor could I endure the thought of killing him while I could render him harmless; and falling into a well-known trick which, had he been half-practised, he could have thwarted, I caught his point on

The Strength of the Weak

my hilt, twisted his weapon from his hand, and sent it whirling into the fire, where its handle fell into the flames. The fellow instantly stepped back and threw up his hands in token of surrender, while I put my sword to his breast, and, backing him into a corner, held him there, and turned my attention to the others.

Cadet and his valet were huddled together, away from the fight, with open-mouthed astonishment on the countenance of the master and abject fear on that of the man. In the hall the soldiers were banging on the locked door, though after a moment that noise ceased. The two contestants had drawn to the open space betwixt the fire and the table, where there was more than ample room for the broadest sword play, and by the way the steels flashed, the almost instantaneous play of *quarte* into *glissade*, and back to *engage*, and from there to *octave* and *tierce*, showed me that if the soldier with whom I had been fighting knew next to nothing of fencing, his master was skilled in the art. At least he was in all but one respect—he was visibly losing a swordsman's temper, a most fatal defect, and the one of all others I had been taught to guard against. And this condition in him was helped by the probable knowledge of the lack of success of his valet, whom I now held under my point. My old master fenced smoothly, even giving ground at his adversary's terrific assaults, though the other was plainly growing impatient that he had not already found his opponent's heart.

I was carried away from all thoughts of self during this magnificent display of arms, as doubtless was the half-soldier, else he might have sprang upon me and made our fight a hand-to-hand encounter. The rapid passes, the quick thrust and parry, the divers play for an opening, and the clash and ring of the steels, held me as nothing else could have done. I had little fear for Peyrotte, unless he became the victim of accident or

The Duel

foul play. He made no sound, nor did he appear much more in earnest than when he was facing me with a foil. The countenance of De Mantel was the colour of his white coat, but it did not strike me that it was through fear; rather was it caused from the depth of his passion and impatience. A thrust *en tierce* finally ripped up the wine-stained sleeve of the officer's right arm, and, though no blood followed the stroke, it seemed more than his fast-failing temper could stand. I saw him dash at Peyrotte with the form of thrust known as *prime*, follow its failure by another, and another, when suddenly, through the play of steels, I marked a circle of flashes, and saw the old soldier's point come out at the back and close to the shoulder of his enemy. De Mantel staggered, dropped his rapier, clapped his hand to his chest, and fell into a chair. He had apparently been run through the right lung.

Leaving my prisoner, I hurried to the centre of the room, where Peyrotte stood looking down at the fallen man, but had hardly arrived there when the pantry door was dashed open by two soldiers, who had found their way thither too late to interfere. And behind them came three women, one of whom was my mother, another the servant, and the third probably the daughter of the so-called Dessonier, for I had but time to mark a strange face, though its beauty impressed me even during the brief glance I gave it.

I have little doubt the soldiers followed the instincts of their calling, and seeing two men with drawn swords bending over their fallen officer, concluded that he had met with foul play. I know not whether their motives made for immediate justice or for revenge only, but one of them stood within six paces of the door through which he had entered, and, raising his piece, deliberately aimed at Peyrotte, while the other, with bayonet at charge, rushed at me. There came a shout from Cadet

The Strength of the Weak

and a shriek from my mother just as I parried with my sword the assault directed towards myself, and simultaneously there sounded the report of the musket of the other. In the immense room the shock of the explosion was stunning, but when I regathered my wits, I saw Peyrotte lying upon the floor. It was the last thing I remember, for, as I sprang towards him, the man I had foiled brought down the butt of his musket on my head. It was a poor blow, not enough completely to stun me; but I turned weak and sick, and fell across the chest of my old master, there fainting.

CHAPTER VII

A PRISONER

WHEN I recovered consciousness I was lying on the bed in my own room, and the last rays of the setting sun shone against the wall opposite the window. That was the first thing I took note of, the second being that I was not alone, as a soldier sat on a chair by the door, musket in hand. It was the fellow who had tried to brain me.

I knew I was hurt, for with the rush of recollection I started bolt upright, thereby causing my head to crack with the pain that shot through it, and I sank back with a groan. With my movement the soldier eyed me askant for a moment, then, setting his weapon against the wall, walked to my side.

"I shall ask your pardon, m'sieur," he said, not unkindly. "My blow brought down the wrong bird. I thought you had a hand in the plight of the captain. M'sieur Cadet informed me too late that you were innocent. I do my duty, m'sieur." And with that he marched back to his station at the door. Not a word did he say of the late tragedy in the room below, and when, after lying quietly, and feeling the pain in my head decrease, I said to him: "I am hurt, my man; my mother should be here instead of you. Will you tell her of my desire to see her?"

He answered nothing for a moment or two, but finally turned to me and said: "Madame will be per-

The Strength of the Weak

mitted to see you in due time. As for my presence, you are a prisoner, m'sieur."

"By whose orders am I a prisoner in my own house?" I returned vociferously, and with a start that caused my wounded head to snap again.

"M'sieur will be wise if he concludes to remain tranquil," he returned. "I guard you by orders of my captain and M'sieur Cadet. It is enough."

Even in my condition I had a glimmer of sense—sense enough to know that I could gain naught by a violent denunciation of the guard, who was but a machine. Therefore, I determined to hold my temper, at least until I could get at the status of affairs. The matter uppermost in my mind was the condition of Peyrotte, and with but half-concealed anxiety I asked:

"Is Bientot—is the Count de Lune badly hurt?"

"You mean the officer of the household, m'sieur? You mean him they call Peyrotte?"

"Aye; he is the true count."

"When we lifted you from him, m'sieur, he was alive, but he will die."

"Will die!" I gasped.

"Will die, m'sieur; and my captain is so hurt that he may follow. Before he fainted, m'sieur, he ordered you to be placed here in confinement—*voilà tout*. There was some mistake. It was unfortunate—but my comrade is a good shot; his eye is the sun, his quickness that of the lightning. He is——"

"He is a cowardly murderer!" I interrupted, fiercely, forgetting my own plight and pain, and springing to the floor with a wild determination to get to Peyrotte and do something, I knew not what. But as I moved towards the door the soldier got to his feet, bringing his musket at charge, and I only halted when the polished bayonet touched my chest.

"M'sieur will compel me to do him more injury,"

A Prisoner

he said, coolly. "M'sieur may not leave this apartment; all else is at his disposal."

I was indeed a prisoner. My abject helplessness smote me like another blow, and I staggered back to the bed, on to which I threw myself as weak and as sick as a child. The chaos of mind that followed was complete, but in the course of time and with the easing of my pain a calmer mood took possession of me. I reviewed in detail all the events of the afternoon, nor did it take me long to discover the animus which directed Dessonier (or De Mantel) to hold me in his power. I knew not how seriously he had been injured; certainly not enough to prevent him from giving orders in relation to myself; but I knew his wound would make impossible his immediate removal, even though he finally recovered. It was plain that his interests would not admit of my being at large pending the result of his hurt—me, his openly avowed enemy, bearing on my person the proofs of his being the murderer of my father. The paper which Peyrotte had given me still lay in my breast-pocket. Why I had not been rifled of it while unconscious I could only account for by thinking that the wounded man had been brought too low to do more than order my arrest, that he might direct his venom at me later. His was the blackest of crimes, yet the power of France was behind him, as shown by the presence of Cadet and the soldiers. It went beyond me, then, to think that such raw injustice was possible among a people whose laws were based on religion and whose civilization was claimed (by themselves) to be the highest. But when I considered the lawlessness of those times, the venality in all branches of the government of France, and particularly that of Canada, I ceased to marvel.

At the opening of the seven years' war, power was the only warrant (and a sufficient one) for every man-

The Strength of the Weak

ner of misdeed ; and, setting aside the question of England's right to invade a section of the country undoubtedly held by the French by virtue of discovery and exploration (I mean the Ohio valley), yet England did a great thing for humanity and progress by uprooting the lilies of France, which had ceased to give forth fragrance as far back as the days of Champlain, and had become but festering weeds in the soil of the western hemisphere. Canada had sunk to be a hot-bed for misrule, vice, and crime, and though the military branch of the government was demoralized enough, it was sweet in the nostrils of mankind when compared with the civil rule under Vaudreuil. Had a man a friend at the gay but mimic court of that governor, he might wreak his revenge where he pleased (provided he struck not too high) and never be called to account by the law.

Therefore, Armand de Mantel felt fairly sure of his ground when he entered our house. In no well-governed land could he have hoped for success in an attempt to defraud a family of their estate. To me, as I thought it over in the quiet and darkness which had now settled on the house, it was painfully clear that his failure to carry his point by misrepresentation and bluster would be followed by something akin to force, but whether open or not was beyond my determining. It was equally plain that the paper which would prove him a murderer would prove a stumbling-block in regard to his acquiring the estate, even if it did not place his liberty in danger. The probable death of Peyrotte (which I could not yet fully realize) would make De Mantel the Count de Lune in fact, and I knew the power of a title. I readily fancied to what lengths he would go to keep his new honour from being publicly dragged in the mud while it was fresh upon him, and I saw clearly that my first business was to place the proofs against him beyond his reach.

A Prisoner

Over this question I pondered to the exclusion of all else, and without coming to a satisfactory conclusion. To get the paper out of my pocket was of the first importance, for I foresaw the danger of being robbed while I slept, and by imperceptible degrees I managed to slip it from my coat. It took at least half an hour to do this, so fearful was I of being marked by the sentry, who still sat at the door, his white coat glimmering through the gloom; but I finally worked it between the sheets and as far down as I could reach. It was by no means safe if the room should be searched, but it was all I could then do. The relief from pain, which had ceased on my becoming quiet, the stillness, and my previous excitement, all contributed finally to put me to sleep; and sleep I did, sweetly and with no dreams. When I woke it was morning, and I was lying just as when slumber overtook me, the paper yet under my body.

The room was deserted by the sentinel, and my head was clear and without pain save when I touched the wound. I had small doubt that I was still guarded from without, and to put it to the proof, I tried the door. It was fastened, but how I could not tell, as there were no locks on any of the upper doors, a plain latch being all that was considered necessary. However, at my trying the catch it was unfastened after some fumbling done from the hall, and when the door opened I discovered it had been tied, and the half-soldier, armed with a musket, stood in the passage.

"M'sieur is awake, then," he said.

"Awake, yes," I answered. "Am I always to be a prisoner under my own roof? Tell me, is the Count—is Peyrotte still alive? Where is my mother?"

To this avalanche of questions put to him the man replied as calmly and evenly as though he was merely

The Strength of the Weak

a machine with the power to articulate. My fiery impatience had no effect on him.

"The servant of m'sieur—the *vieille moustache* called Peyrotte—is still alive; his condition is the same," he returned. "Madame is well. Doubtless m'sieur will have what he requires. M'sieur Cadet desires to wait upon him at his convenience."

"May I not see my friend?" I asked appealingly.

"It will be as M'sieur Cadet directs," was the impassive answer.

"Then I will see the butcher at once. Where is he?" I said, advancing into the hall, whereat the man brought up his musket.

"I suggest that m'sieur le seigneur be reasonable. M'sieur Cadet will be notified, but it would be well if the seigneur does not call him butcher to his face; he would remain hard; he loves not old times memories."

The man spoke with a faint English accent, and his plain deference to me made me hopeful that I might make some use of him.

"You are not French, *mon camarade*?" I said, with a change of tone.

"I am the son of my father, m'sieur," he answered, frigidly. "Will you return to your apartment?"

There was nothing more for it but to swing on my heel and retire. The door was refastened, and I heard the man's footsteps go down the hall. It was a relief for me to know that Peyrotte was still alive, the report that he remained in an unchanged condition giving me encouragement. But not of Cadet would I ask the favour of seeing him; nay, I would demand the right, which shows I was very young. In the interval of waiting the next move I put myself in order, changing the dress-clothes I had worn to a plainer suit, and then I went to the window and looked out. Throughout the time my mind was busy thinking up a mode of con-

A Prisoner

cealing the paper, but every device I conceived was open to objections. Ideas of hiding it in the ewer, the chimney, under the carpet, or in nooks or corners, occurred to me, but there was not a place I could think of that would not be probed when it came to deliberate searching. My own person was the least safe of all.

But as I stood looking out of the window the solution flashed upon me. I would tie it to a cord and let it down into the vine that had clambered half-way up the side of the house. By securing the upper end of the line I could recover it in an instant, and this could be made feasible by pegging the cord to the frame of the window. In Canada the windows of all houses were made to swing outward; thus the line would be carried away from the sight of any within the room, and there was little likelihood of its being seen from the ground. Of line there was a plenty in the way of fishing-gear, and not a soul appeared between the house and the strip of forest beyond—a pistol-shot away—to spy upon my work, but I had barely turned to execute my design when footsteps sounded in the hall, the fastenings outside were unloosed, the door opened, and Cadet entered, closing it behind him.

His appearance was greatly changed, both in his dress, which was sober by contrast with that which he had worn the previous evening, and in his manner, which had lost all pretence of smoothness. His coarse face was the same, saving the fact that there was a trace of worry plainly showing on his heavy features. He spoke abruptly:

“M’sieur wishes his breakfast, wishes his mother, and wishes to see his friend. He may have all. It may give him satisfaction to know that M’sieur De Mantel—I beg his honour’s pardon, the count—is comfortable, and in no great danger if his wound does not further inflame. It was a cowardly deed—that of your

The Strength of the Weak

servant—M'sieur Chatsworth, but he has paid the penalty. It must pass."

For the life of me I could look in no way but that of contempt on the man as he spoke. His brazen effrontery, his brutal countenance, with its multitude of pimples, maddened and disgusted me at once. It was all I could do to control myself.

"I desire to see the count—the true count, my friend Peyrotte. I demand it. You call him cowardly. What of the cowardice of the miserable——"

"You are rash," he interrupted. "It behooves m'sieur to listen to one who might befriend him on occasion. It is possible his wish may be granted; it is also possible that he knows nothing of what it means to cross the wishes of Joseph Cadet. M'sieur has a head."

He paused. His face broke into an expressionless smile, meant to be conciliatory, perhaps, but his long eye-teeth shone behind his lips like tusks. I looked at him from head to foot with increasing loathing, but made no answer. This seemed to bring him to the point, for, with a sudden gathering of his brows, he continued with considerable asperity:

"You have a paper of value to the Count de Lune, and that paper I desire for my wounded friend. You will see your interest in handing it to me."

"Upon what terms?" I demanded, shortly.

"You know neither the count nor me when you speak of terms," he answered. "You will trust *us* for the rest."

"I can trust you for nothing," I returned, catching at a chance for delay. "That which I might have been willing to defend is beyond my power to defend; therefore, not being able to accede, I trust you will set me at liberty, and trust *me* not to call either of you to account for the outrage to my name and to my house."

A Prisoner

He seemed a trifle nonplussed, both at my words and the defiant manner I had thought best to assume, but he rejoined:

"So you demand that *we* trust *you*. M'sieur has much to learn. However, I do not understand. The paper was given to you by your servant. He called me to witness——"

"You forget, M'sieur Cadet, that I was attacked, stunned, and remained insensible for I know not how long. When I awoke this morning, a prisoner, the thing in question had gone from my person. I know not of its contents beyond that which was told me."

As I had hoped, this statement staggered him, and it was plain that at first he believed all I had meant to convey. He looked helplessly about for a few moments, and then said:

"You were alone last night?"

"I was not," I replied. "I was insulted by having a guard placed in my room."

"Which one?" he demanded.

"It is for you to find out, M'sieur Cadet," I answered, forcing a broad smile. "Whoever has the paper doubtless knows its value. I care not how it becomes public, but I can readily see that your villainous friend, and perhaps yourself, will quail at the idea."

"Your ignorance of me makes you bold," he blurted out, his red face taking on a shade of purple. "I am not here to cross words with you. I will look into it." He concluded abruptly, and fixed his little pig-like eyes on me with a glare; then, without more ado, he turned and left the room.

Knowing now the necessity for working quickly, I went to the closet, and from my fishing-rod unrove some fifteen feet of twine, which I was winding into a compact ball, when again I was interrupted by the

The Strength of the Weak

return of Cadet and my guard of the night. As abruptly as he left me, the agent began :

“ M’sieur Chatsworth, you have lied to me. This man denies having gone near you or molesting you in any way while you slept. You have that which I wish, must have, and shall obtain.”

“ I hear you,” I replied.

“ You will yet do more ; but mark the consideration with which I return your ingratitude. I have come to conduct you to your dying friend, who has just received extreme unction ; also to your mother, who is about to depart for Montreal. Two tender leave-takings, which I am too soft of heart to deny you.”

My defiant mood fell from me at this, and indeed, with the prospect of Peyrotte’s death and my mother’s absence, it was no great wonder. For a moment consternation ruled me, and probably showed in my face, for the piggish eyes of Cadet gave signs of his satisfaction as they blinked at me. Without a word in return, I obeyed his commanding “ Follow me,” and we three filed through the hall and down the stairs, the soldier, with his musket, bringing up the rear. Cadet walked straight to Peyrotte’s own room, and opened the door without ceremony. The old soldier lay on his bed, clad in the brilliant uniform in which he fell, his coat and waistcoat having been thrown open to expose the wound in his chest. He was breathing rapidly, and his eyes were shut, but from the colour of his face alone I knew that death was hovering over the old hero. At the opposite side of the bed stood my mother, looking down on the dying man. She had aged wonderfully.

As we entered she hurried to meet me, but the burly form of the agent interposed.

“ No nearer, madame, no nearer,” he said, in his loud, coarse voice. “ You must make your *devoirs* at a distance, and we have no time to lose.”

A Prisoner

"Am I not to embrace my son?"

"No, madame."

My mother mustered her French, and spoke vehemently under her breath:

"You are a heartless monster, a soulless ape, the lowest of the low. May God guard you from the wrath to come!" And with a fine sweeping gesture she suddenly flanked the agent and her arms were about me.

Cadet turned crimson with rage, but he either had enough respect for the dying (though he had not shown it in his voice) or a sufficient superstitious fear of the death-chamber to refrain from attempting violence at that time. He motioned the soldier to stand by the door while he walked to the foot of the bed, and, leaning on the rail, looked at the gasping man. Peyrotte, aroused by the noise and movement, opened his eyes, and, seeing me, raised his hand and beckoned, but he did not speak. For a long time I sat by his side holding his poor hand, his eyes fixed on mine, while the occasional tremulous closing of his fingers was a plain recognition of my presence. In the meantime my mother had fallen on her knees, her face buried in the bed-clothes, the soldier stood at the door, and Cadet, like a bloated figurehead, still leaned over the foot of the bed. There was small hope that he would miss a word or gesture which might come from the dying man; and it was becoming evident that I had been brought hither less as a charity than in the hope that something would pass betwixt Peyrotte or my mother and myself that could be reported and might be of use to the wounded tyrant who lay in the adjoining room. I could not see the agent, my back being towards him, but I was well aware of his impatience as the minutes sped, for he shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. Finally, unable to stand it longer, he broke out:

The Strength of the Weak

“Come, m’sieur and madame, I have no more time to waste. Say your last words. We should be on the road even now, and much remains to be done.”

I felt Peyrotte’s fingers tighten on mine, then he slowly disengaged his hand, and raising his arm with an effort, pointed at Cadet, then at the door, the last of his animation showing in the stern gaze he fixed upon the man at the foot of the bed. As he completed his gesture, he gathered his breath and strength, and shouted, “Go!” There were command, threat, and entreaty in the single word. For a moment Cadet stood his ground doggedly. But the dignity of death and the piercing eyes of the old man were too much for his superstitious nature; he muttered something, of which all I gathered was that he would return shortly, and went out, leaving the soldier on guard at the door.

As Cadet disappeared my mother drew from her bosom a folded note and passed it to me hurriedly. “I was afraid I would have no chance to deliver this, my son. I am going to Montreal to appeal to the governor; they permit it—aye, they absolutely allow me to have a will——”

She was interrupted by the dying man, who suddenly raised himself to his elbow and grasped my shoulder.

“Maurice, I die, I die, but thou shalt live. Thou hast a sword, and it is I who taught thee to use it, and now I tell thee it is thy only trust, for France is perfidious. Oh, my France, thy lilies are begrimed and broken! It is an assassin who has done this to me, Maurice; not the conscript who shot, but he who lies in the next room. My point went high, else I would have rid the world of a villain, of a devil; but I fear he will live to curse thee. Beware of him, Maurice; mark him down for thy father’s sake and mine; he slew us both. Yet fair, lad; fair, lad. Not in the back, nor by

A Prisoner

lead, but by clear steel. Thou canst do it; thou canst do it, and it was I who taught——”

He stopped abruptly, stared about him in wide-eyed wonder as though he was seeing an apparition, then his grip on my shoulder relaxed and he fell forward on his face. I knew he had passed on ere I turned him over. Then I sank on my knees beside my mother and sobbed aloud.

But the period of our uninterrupted mourning was not long. The agent re-entered, as though he possessed an instinctive knowledge of Peyrotte's death, and in less than a quarter of an hour I was a prisoner in my own room. As I took leave of my old friend I also took leave of my boyishness and lightness of heart. They seemed to remain behind with the silent figure over whose face my mother dropped her lace handkerchief ere she turned and followed me. And, to my astonishment, she was permitted to continue after me, even into my own apartment, the butcher trudging behind, and there Cadet unmasked the cause of his leniency.

“M'sieur, I beg you will reconsider your determination and hand me that which is wished. Madame, prevail upon your son. Assure him it will be for his benefit no longer to conceal from us—from me—the matter I desire. Have I not been considerate? Have I used harsh measures? Remember that though I am now kind, I can be otherwise.”

There was a smoothness to his voice I had not heard before; an unctuous purr that would not have deceived a child. It stripped his hypocrisy stark naked. My mother did not even look at him in return, but spoke to me with a spirit so unusual that I was as much surprised at the vigour of her speech as at the matter.

“Maurice, they are a band of robbers. Whatever you have, I know not what it may be, hold it from them. This is my farewell for a time, my son. God

The Strength of the Weak

knows when I will return—in a week, perhaps—and they tell me you will then be here. If I fail to obtain justice, get away, if possible, but never lift a finger for France. You are absolved. Listen. Peyrotte was right. The man below killed your father; the proof is perfect, but I cannot give it to you. Peyrotte had it. I should have seen to it long since. I meant to have told you all, but held it back to save your heart, my son, and now it is too late.”

She bowed her head, and something like a sob escaped her; while I, caring little now whether my jailers understood English or not, spoke up, to give her the only grain of comfort in my power.

“I have these proofs, madame. Peyrotte handed them to me before he fell. It is that paper they are trying to obtain, but I think I can hold it from them. Do not worry for me. Go to Vaudreuil; if he is human, he will right us.”

“God bless you, Maurice!” she returned. “We will live to see them tremble. Let them not cajole you into signing anything. I may yet raise a friend to offset this brute and his colleague below; if I do not you are friendless indeed. Much of this I have written. Read my note; and now good-bye.”

Without a tear in either voice or eye she turned to the agent, and pointing to the door, said in French: “Precede me, thief.” The man fairly shrunk beneath the majesty of her anger and contempt, and moved aside; but the glitter of his small eyes showed how his coarse nature had been moved, and it boded little good to either my mother or myself. With a movement too quick to be thwarted, she clasped me in her arms, kissed my forehead, and ere either of us could break down she turned and left the room, Cadet following. The agent’s appeal to my mother had been answered.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SLOUGH OF DESPOND

I REMAINED without moving until all had become quiet, and then I pulled out the note my mother had given to me. There were really two notes, both from her. One was for myself, and it contained the information of her intended trip to Montreal, which trip seemed to be encouraged by Cadet, who had taken charge of the house since the night before. Besides an affectionate farewell, it told me how she, too, had been confined to her room. Of De Mantel she could say no more than that he occupied the great chamber, and that a surgeon had been summoned from Three Rivers. The note ended by directing me to escape as soon as possible, make my way to the English colonies, and deliver the inclosed paper as directed.

The contents of this letter showed plainly enough the spirit of Cadet and his fellows. The barbarous manner in which they had taken the direction of affairs was sufficient proof that they purposed to carry all before them without fear of consequences. The second note was directed, "*To Mr. William Johnson. At Fort Johnson on the Mohawk or at Albany.*" It ran thus:

"KINSMAN: Through the goodness of God, this, I hope, will be handed to you by my son Maurice. He is an Englishman by blood and by birth. Teach him to make his reputation above reproach; it is now clouded by that of his father, who, as you know, desired to be-

The Strength of the Weak

come disentangled from the French, and met his death in so trying. My son will detail the manner of our undoing. Give him asylum for the sake of kinship; give him encouragement for his own sake and kindness for mine. His sword is for England. I have long suspected his heart to be with it. God guard you.

“ELIZABETH CHATSWORTH.”

In this my mother showed that she had either suddenly changed the sentiments she had held the day before or she had disguised her true feelings during our interview held prior to the fateful dinner. Whatever her mind, however, her present plan was for me to escape and throw aside all allegiance to France. This was plain, both from her last words to me and from her notes. It was no effort for me to give up any lingering sense of duty I owed the French, for my mother was right—my heart was with those of my own blood. But to escape—that was another matter. Granting I could get from the house, how could I reach the English settlements, the nearest, to my knowledge, being Albany? A trackless wilderness intervened; a wilderness filled with the more or less savage foes of England; and to be captured with two such papers as my father's last statement and the letter to Mr. Johnson would be to be damned as something akin to a spy. I felt mightily sure that a French subject possessing such documents would be looked upon as a traitor, at least, and, though nothing worse happened, I would be returned to my captors in the end. There was more than this that caused me hard thinking. I took into account the immediate pursuit which would certainly ensue, as well as my ignorance, lack of method, and also of provisions of any kind. All these made escape appear but a word; liberty an impossibility; the future, blackness. But if I could not escape, I could and would balk De Mantel's

The Slough of Despond

effort in obtaining that which was most important to him, and so I set about it.

It took me but a moment to jam a sliver of wood into a crevice of the shrunken wood-work of one side of the window ; and this done, I tied what I may call the proofs (which I had not yet opened) and the note to Johnson to the end of a fishing-line I took from my pole, then looked carefully about to see that the coast was clear. No one was in sight. I let the precious packet down until it rested among the twigs and leaves of the vine ten or twelve feet below me, and was about cutting off the surplus cord, that I might fix the end to the peg, when I heard the door of the room being once more unfastened. There was no time to work deliberately. The door opened as I hurriedly twisted the cord around the peg, which, in my haste, I dislodged from its slight hold on the wood, and my heart sank as I felt string and all slip from my fingers and fall, but I dared not betray my emotion as I turned and confronted the untimely intruders. Again it was Cadet, this time with two soldiers. The agent spoke no word to me, but, pointing with his fat finger, simply said :

“ Search him ! ”

The men placed their muskets in a corner and advanced on me. I made no resistance, nor did I protest against this fresh indignity, both because I knew either to be useless and because I was prepared for it. They found nothing of consequence, save my pocket-knife and the letter from my mother to me, which latter they handed to Cadet. He evidently knew nothing of written English, but his face brightened as he said, “ It shall be translated,” and placed it in his pocket. Their strict search of the room lasted fully an hour, and by its thoroughness I saw how well founded had been my doubts of being able to conceal the papers anywhere about the apartment. For not a square inch of the room was

The Strength of the Weak

left unprobed, neither was an article in it left undisturbed, even the mattress and pillows being ripped open without ceremony or apology and their contents scattered about the floor. The carpet was torn up, the floor itself sounded, the chimney scoured, and every joint of the bed and remaining furniture scrutinized. The closet was stripped, even my fowling-piece, which stood therein, being measured by its ramrod to make sure the missing papers had not been hidden in the barrel.

As the search progressed without fruit Cadet's face grew blacker and blacker, and when at last it was plain that the papers could not be in the room, he lost all control of himself, swearing, like the low-bred villain he was, shaking his fist in my face and all but striking me, while I, seated on the wreck of the bedstead, grinned broadly at him (though there was no mirth in me) for the sole purpose of increasing his passion and adding to his discomfort. It was a foolish, boyish thing to do, but as my only present way of hitting back, I did it and received much satisfaction therefrom.

The paper was out of his hands at least, if out of mine as well; but the small triumph I had in this was brought to a sudden end when one of the soldiers poked his head from the window and espied the string on the vine below. He had wit enough to follow its significance and reported the fact to the now ferocious agent, who at once hurried from the room, taking with him one of the soldiers and leaving the other on guard.

When the door was fastened and I was again alone, I went to the window to witness the act which would dispossess me of my only power over my enemies. Indeed, I was sore at heart, though anger kept me from sinking beneath the weight of the cruel injustice that had been worked on me. If there was a grain of comfort it was that the accident of losing the string had not hurried events, as it would surely have been discovered

The Slough of Despond

by the sharp eyes of the man who had been bright enough to look beyond the walls of the room, and it was the fellow whom I had the same as accused of theft from my person. Doubtless he now felt sure of his quarry, and his satisfaction must have been great—as great as my own chagrin. Presently I saw him hurrying around the wing of the house bearing a ladder and followed by Cadet. But there was no need for a ladder. The puffing agent evidently saw the end of the string within easy reach, it probably having been dragged down by the weight of the compact papers, and plunging his arm into the mass of shrubbery, he pulled out the cord and drew its whole length from the vine. It was clear of everything in the way of papers. I could see both ends, one of which still bore the peg that had been carried away, but the other was bare of even the loop I had made to fasten the little package.

If the men below were disappointed, I was thunder-struck. The stout line could not have broken under the trivial weight of its burden; but beyond knowing that, I was sure of nothing. A certain sense of relief came to me, though I saw not how I was to profit by this more than strange episode. It was doubtful satisfaction, at best, though, when coupled with the sound of Cadet's swearing, the feeling was one of mild triumph.

After venting their rage on the air, a short consultation was held between the two below, and a thorough search of the vine and the ground beneath ensued, but in the end it was given up without result. The papers had disappeared.

I was no believer in miracles, nor am I now, but what less could lift me from my narrow straits or what account for the loss of the all-important package was far from then being clear.

Regarding the former, I might have thought it strange that my tenants had not risen to defend me, or

The Strength of the Weak

at least to rescue me ; but the strangeness passed when I considered that they could know nothing of the trouble, and even had they become suspicious, the sight of the French uniform, an all-powerful argument to their simplicity, and a well-told lie would quiet all misgivings and desire to act. I might have found hope in my mother's errand to the governor had I not known the relations existing between himself, Bigot, and Cadet. At best, she would obtain words, regrets, and smooth promises that would die with the breath, and no more.

The loss of the package was a plain enigma, and caused me more wonder than aught else that had happened, though its mysterious disappearance was the cause of my final salvation. I was positive that no one was in sight in the brief time it took me to lower it from the window, and I knew from almost immediate subsequent events that it had not fallen into the hands of the parties who were most interested in taking it from me. I became weary of thinking about it.

All that day, without food and with nothing but the insipid water in the ewer to slake my thirst, I remained alone in the wrecked room. The guard without was strictly kept, for I could hear the movement of the sentinel and his tramp up and down the hall. As darkness fell I demanded to see Cadet, but was informed that he had departed for Montreal with my mother, and on asking for food, I was put off with a promise. The fellow told me he had his orders, but he would go so far as to say that my wants would be immediately supplied if I would surrender the missing documents or reveal their hiding-place. It was evident that I was to be starved into submission, but as yet I was too untamed to submit and state how the papers had passed from my hands. I did not dream then that the man who had murdered my father was preparing to murder me by starvation, but it soon became apparent. Gods! Had I but known him

The Slough of Despond

the day before as I knew him after, in my temper I would have finished Peyrotte's work with a stroke of my own.

It was well into the night when I threw myself on the pile of carpet and slept. Brought low by misfortune and lack of nourishment, I lay like one dead until aroused by a light in my eyes, and then sprang up to see a strange officer and a strange soldier before me. With a glance about the room, the former made the remark that I had played the devil with my belongings, and bade me follow him. I questioned him as to who he was and where he wished me to go, but he only shook his bullet head and scowled as he repeated his order. As nothing could be gained by resisting, I walked out between the two. We passed down the stairs and into the great hall, where the clock was just striking midnight, and from there on to the kitchen, the smell of recent cooking making my stomach yearn and driving me to desperation. I was hungry with the hunger of a healthy man, and had been without food for thirty hours.

You who are young and lusty, have you ever been famished until you felt a brother to the wolf? Yes? Then you have no need of words to tell of the madness that came to me with the smell of food. No? Then words would be useless.

I had hoped that food was to be given to me, and my eye roved through the dim light cast by the candle the soldier was carrying, like that of a hawk seeking its prey. But there was no stop; instead, the officer stepped ahead, and going to the cellar-door, threw it open. Then in a trice I saw the meaning of my removal and the sinister aspect of the future. I knew it all, and all at once, and my weakened mind and body rose in open revolt. With a cry that was more a snarl than aught else, I struck the white-coated officer a blow in

The Strength of the Weak

the face, my fist crashing against his teeth. He swung about, toppled an instant, lost his balance, and fell down the black stairway. Turning on the soldier, in a flash I dashed out his light and started for the pantry. Food was all I looked for then; I had no hope for escape. But I was no match for the powerful man behind me. He was upon me in a stride, and grasping me by the neck, swung me about and hurled me after the officer. I presume my head struck during the fall, but I felt no blow, only a sense of sinking into infinite blackness and then into infinite rest.

CHAPTER IX

THE CELLAR

Now it makes little difference how long I remained unconscious, though it was a matter of eight or ten hours, as I afterwards found, but when I came to myself I was lying on a mattress spread on the stone floor of a room in the cellar, a dim light coming through a shallow barred window near the ceiling. I was strangely free from pain or any bodily suffering, but when I raised myself I was so light-headed from emptiness and maltreatment that the cell I was in swam about me as though my brain had turned to water. Presently that feeling passed and I was able to think, and then I guessed at my whereabouts. As in all the superior class of Canadian dwellings, there was a full story of the house built beneath the surface of the ground, the better to get foundation far below the frost line and for the sake of warmth for the sills. The manor-house of the Seigneury De Mantel had been thus constructed, only, as it was out of the common in many ways (owing to its English builder), the underground portion was used only as a place for storage. It had been divided up into a labyrinth of rooms and passages the like of which I had never seen before and but once since, and that under a house in the town of Rye, on Long Island Sound. From wine to milk, from meats to game, and on to vegetables, each character of article had its separate compartment, the result being some twenty cells for the safe keeping of commodities. And it was in one

The Strength of the Weak

of these cells I now found myself. This room, like the rest, was ventilated by a narrow window that opened into a pit dug from above, and this, like every window save those on the top floor, was barred against attack from without, and further fortified by a heavy wooden shutter which opened inward. The place was frigid in winter, damp and cool in summer, and, being of rough stone throughout, saving the huge square rafters overhead, was depressing in the extreme. The apartment was some ten feet long by eight feet in width, and was closed by a ponderous oaken door without a sign of a fastening from within. The room differed in no way from a dungeon, save that a small transom was above the door, which had been let into the wall to increase the circulation of air when the shutter should be closed. The opening was far too small for even a child to squeeze through, as was the window, even had it been free from its bars. Of furniture there was none, unless one could so call the mattress and the blanket covering me, to which might be added an empty keg, with an end knocked out, standing in a corner, just visible through the dusk of the den. These were all. And being relegated to this hole was the final disposition made of me, by order, probably, of the coward who dared not deal openly.

I did not then know that my death, through starvation, was his deliberate intention, nor that if I was once out of the way his path would be clear. I discovered long after that, though De Mantel had obtained his commission in the army and a pardon for the offence of his youth, under the hard condition that both would be rescinded did he again fall under the pale of the law, his estate could only be restored on proofs that my title was flawed by possible illegitimacy or that I died without issue. The animus of his actions was then plain. His business incapacity, foul temper, and lack of self-

The Cellar

control had hurried him into a series of circumstances from which there was no escape save through possession of my father's dying statement and my own death. Peyrotte's knowledge of De Mantel's guilt, the old soldier's open insult, and his subsequent claim to the title of Count de Lune (which honour De Mantel probably never dreamed would be contested) roused that monster to a pitch of desperation that had well-nigh cost him his life. With Cadet to abet him, he had got rid of my mother, and was prepared to go to extremes with me, trusting to time and the ignorance of the government at Paris to cover the crime. His failure to obtain the proofs had doubtless been a blow; but if I had so hidden them that they could not be found, he probably reasoned that there would be small likelihood of their ever coming to light after the breath was out of my body.

Sunshine, morally or physically, seemed far enough away as I sat on the mattress and brought my confused wits into line. I was weak, yet not so far gone but a meal would have put me in fair order. I found myself woefully sore when I moved, and stiffened besides, probably through my fall down the stairs. But with a wish to find out what I could while yet I had strength, I got to my feet and tried the door by sounding it with my fist. It appeared as solidly fixed as the beams above me. I groped through the dust on the floor and in the corners for something that might have been overlooked—I knew not what—and found nothing but a spider, which darted up my arm in a panic. I shook the thing off in terror, and saw it scuttle into a crack in the flagging ere I could put my foot on it. Then I turned to the keg, got it on end and trundled it beneath the window. I climbed on its top and looked out. I could not bring my eye to the level of the ground, which was yet two feet above me, but I got a broad glimpse of

The Strength of the Weak

the sky, flecked here and there with a white cloud sailing before the west wind.

It was a glorious summer day, and yet its glory seemed to mock me. A hawk, poised in mid-air, was the epitome of freedom, and one making mankind appear as slaves at best; to me the sight of the bird was fascinating torture. The warm wind drove the scent of the balsam of the forest into my nostrils and spoke of liberty and innocence and the beauty of the land, and hope and plenty and contentment. It suggested all these to me who had known them but a short time since, and the comfort of it came like a blessing. But like the sky, the clouds, and the birds, it soon became flavoured with derision. The only thing that did not pall was the absolute silence that seemed to block the sense of hearing. There was no mockery in that. For all the pain of it, I could not tear myself away from the sight of the strip of sky, and I stood and drank it in until I was more heart-sick than ever, and my trembling knees had well-nigh let me down. Then I dragged my mattress beneath the window, and lay there looking up until the radiance blinded me and the weight of life seemed more than I could support. I remember saying over and over, "This is God's footstool and the devil's hell"; for the beauty of nature and the misery of my condition were both realized, though in a heavy, helpless way. Then I thanked the Almighty that my mother was not beset with the knowledge of my condition, and from her I drifted to De Mantel's daughter, and wondered if she knew and abetted her father's savage cruelty. What a hideous mass of moral and spiritual corruption cased in a lovely person was she, if, by inheritance, his nature lurked in hers! Finally, I wept from sheer physical weakness, then raged, then wept again, and at last gradually quieted into the apathy of hopelessness with only the faint spark of the spirit left within. No food,

The Cellar

no water, no face, and no sound, save that of the wind anon and the call of some nearby bird. At last I fancied I was buried and forgotten, so sprang to the door in a wild frenzy, beating the heavy planks with my bare fists until the pain of it compelled me to stop. Then I shouted at the window until my voice gave out, and finally, thoroughly exhausted, fell headlong on to the mattress and stared at the cobwebbed beams overhead.

I saw my end and all that my tortures meant; then I fell to calculating, and quite calmly, too, how long a man might live without food or water though housed and quiet. I knew that delirium would come, and visions of plenty, and then death, and I examined my intellect that I might note if my reason was yet tottering. I could find no flaw in memory or connected thought. I repeated old proverbs and old poems; said the alphabet backward, and quoted Virgil, construing it literally and figuratively. My mind was clear enough—too clear; every faculty was on edge and refined, although they waited on nothing in particular. My eye could now discern the slightest speck in the darkest corner, though it was no lighter than before; my ear was keen for the faintest sound.

And it was while I was thus examining myself that I heard a noise from beyond the door. It was that of footsteps, though not as of one boldly approaching; rather like a suspicious person tip-toeing, in order to keep his presence secret. I heard him come over the flagging of the passage and then stop. There was a cautious moving of some heavy body, a slight scratching on the door, and I marked a man's arm thrust through the transom, the hand holding a bottle, a loaf of bread, and a bit of paper tied together with a string, and so alive was I to details that I plainly marked the quality of the cord that bound them, and the bow tie of the knot. I sprang up with a cry, the intensity of which

The Strength of the Weak

must have betrayed my state, and seizing the package was about to speak to the owner of the arm, when he withdrew it, and in a moment I heard him retreating down the passage in the same cautious manner of his approach. I stood as one in a dream, the bottle and loaf alone being witnesses of reality ; indeed, so doubtful was I of myself that I felt of the loaf, smelled it, rapped the bottle with my knuckles, and finally bit my hand that I might waken myself if I slept. But it was all real ; aye, more, it was a godsend to a dying man.

Starved though I was, I first hurried to the window and read the paper. It had been scrawled with a burned stick, and was in English.

“ Eat every crumb. Rid yourself of the bottle and this paper that they may not be found. Sleep while you can by day, but be awake at night.” The note was unsigned.

It is an axiom that the world's happiness and unhappiness is largely a matter of comparison. Indeed, 'tis so, for the possession of but a dry loaf and some wine, the knowledge that I must have a friend without, and these poor means of sustaining life, albeit I was still imprisoned in a miserable hole under my own roof, caused a revulsion of feeling that shook me more than the worst of my misfortunes. I was suddenly happy with the happiness of an infant, to which joy there is no equal. I was rich ; God had raised his hand in my behalf.

I am well-nigh ashamed to own it, but the sight of me sitting on the edge of the mattress devouring the loaf and drinking from the broken neck of the bottle would have been pitiful. My tears mingled with the bread, and my blubbering was that of an abused child, but it was from relief. Between bite and sup I read again and again the note I had spread at my side, as though it were a veritable friend in the flesh. I was

The Cellar

weak. I knew it. But I will maintain that it was not the weakness of spirit, for at that moment had De Mantel offered me my liberty at the price of my subjection I should have refused as stubbornly as ever. When once I felt the stimulus of my repast, I became rational, and set about hiding the signs of food. The note I tore to bits, chewed the scraps into a mass, rolled it in the dirt of the floor, and jammed it into a crack. The bottle I hid beneath the mattress; then I laid me down and slept. When I woke there was a faint gleam in the sky that told of evening, and I looked forward to the night in a way that may be imagined; but the night brought nothing. I heard faint sounds of footsteps on the floor above, and once a loud burst of laughter muffled by the thickness of the wood; but nothing else came to my ear, and by midnight all sounds ceased.

The next day came and went. I was supplied with food as before, but with no note this time, and the night passed without event. Five days dawned and died thus, always with food smuggled to me by an unknown's hand, though sometimes I was stinted in quantity, as though the source of supply was uncertain; but not a word from the one who was serving me nor a glimpse of his face over the transom of the door. At times I was plunged into despair, then raised high in hope, but the food and the hope kept me from sinking for any great length of time.

The sixth night was ushered in by a terrific thunderstorm, which lasted for hours. By this time I was so weary of my cell that nearly all of my waking moments were spent on the keg with my face to the bars of the window. On this night the rain was so heavy that it drove into the room, the glare of the lightning so fierce that it blinded me, and I returned to my bed. At about midnight, as the thunder was rolling at a distance,

The Strength of the Weak

though the flashes from the clouds were still brilliant, there came the noise of heavy footsteps from the passage, and an oblong of light from a carried candle outlined the transom opening as it fell on the opposite wall. I lay still and waited, for now there was no secrecy in the approach, but, instead, the loud voice of a man plainly intoxicated. Nearer came the voice, until its owner stopped at the door.

"Shall I open, m'sieur le capitaine?" asked a man. "He must be dead long since."

"*Sacré*, no! Help me to look in above the door. Upon this puncheon—so. I'll go near no carcass this night." There was a rasping noise, a sound of scrambling, and just as a flash of lightning shot from the clouds there appeared at the transom a candle and the face of the officer whom I had assaulted. As the fitful glare lighted the room his eyes met mine. The head and the candle suddenly disappeared; there was immediate darkness, the noise of a tumbling barrel, a falling body, and then a shower of curses.

"Holy mother of God, but he has gone to hell with his eyes open, and the look of them blasts me! No more of this to-night. Back to the *salon*; I will see to him to-morrow. *Sacré!* Why did you not catch me? My thigh is broken. Give a heed to your looks while above, and tell the count I have done his bidding." The voice and the footsteps died away in the darkness, and that was the end of the episode for the time.

Some two hours later, when the rain had ceased, the clouds had broken, showing a few wet stars, and I was standing under the window looking up, there came again the cautious footsteps I had heard each day. But when they reached the door there was no arm thrust through the transom, but instead there came the shooting of a bolt, the door opened, and a man entered.

Now, it was far too black to see man or door, but I

The Cellar

heard the movements of the one and the groaning of the hinges of the other, and I held myself flat against the wall, as though I were a part of it, for I knew not if the intrusion meant good or evil for me. Whoever it was, he guarded against noise with mighty care, for he closed the door gently and as softly swung the shutter over the window; then, striking a flint, he managed to light a candle he had brought with him. The first gleam of the flame showed me the swarthy countenance of the half-soldier, the valet of De Mantel, the man whom I had disarmed, and who had been my strictest guard. The horror that smote me as it flashed through me that he had come expecting to find me dead, and on being disappointed would revenge himself and finish the work of his master, drove me to desperation, and I sprang from the empty keg and raised it, determined to make a fight for my life. But the fellow lifted the candle above his head the better to cast its light about, and seeing me in my defiant position, broke into a broad but thin-lipped grin, and said in good, sound English:

“On me soul, an’ ye are a man o’ spirit! Did ye fancy I was that devil above? Small wonder; but speak low. They will be down ere long, an’ ye must be out o’ this. Faith, I want the coop for a cock with gayer feathers!”

“And is it you who have been feeding me?” I asked. “You tried to kill me once.”

“The same, lad. ’Twas I that took to playin’ the raven to your Elijah, an’ ’twas only lately—the day o’ yer first mouthful—that I found ye were other than a Frenchy. There is small time to lose in talk; bide here a bit.”

He placed his candle on the floor and left the cell, though in a moment he returned, staggering under the weight of a great stick of fire-wood well-nigh as long as my body and nearly as thick.

The Strength of the Weak

“Now, lad,” he said, with a thin, string-like smile, the like of which I had never seen and which was irresistibly humorous, though I failed to realize it just then. “Now, lad, we’ll proceed to git ye into yer shroud; for ye be dead, ye must know, and the count will not be havin’ yer carcass beneath him for longer. His orders are that ye be buried at dawn, an’ that time is not far off. They will be here on the business soon, not knowin’ that I happen to ha’ got ahead o’ them. Take that, an’ use it if it should come to the worst.”

He thrust a hunting-knife into my hand, and then threw the log on to the mattress, so rolling it in the blanket that from the door it looked to be a corpse sewn in a cover. After doing this the man opened the shutter about half-way and we went into the passage. A row of boxes and barrels lined the stone tunnel, these being the matter cleared from the cell to make room for me, and, with the word to squeeze myself as small as possible, my saviour directed me to crawl behind them, lie down, and remain silent until he gave the word; then, after shooting the bolt to my late prison, he blew out his candle and tip-toed away.

CHAPTER X

A FAIR EXCHANGE

THE passage was deadly still and without the faintest glimmer of light, yet, notwithstanding this, my narrow quarters and the decidedly precarious condition of my fortunes, the gloom and silence did not in the least prevent my spirits rising. I became as light-hearted as though I was roaming the outer world without a care on my soul. I felt that starvation and imprisonment had nearly ended, and, in place of the depression I had hitherto known, there grew in me, as I lay, a yearning for revenge, or, in the words I then made for it, a mighty wish to punish my torturers with my own hands. I miscalled it simple justice.

At last, by raising my head above the barrier, I marked the oblong opening over the door of the cell faintly backed by the ghastly light of dawn stealing through the window, and almost immediately after this discovery I heard footsteps on the stairway and saw the flash of a light being carried along the passage. I lay close enough then, my heart beating like a drum. By the steps I counted three men, and the voice of the one to speak first was that of my deliverer.

"I came down, m'sieur le capitaine, an hour since, and made him ready. Was I right?"

"No, you dog! How dare you meddle without orders?" came from the officer who had viewed me through the transom. "I must see him, that I may swear to the count that the boy has passed. He is in

The Strength of the Weak

the devil's own temper because I would not finish him with a shot three days since. Open the door and uncover the face!"

"Ahead with the light there, Louis," said my friend. "I hope you dug the hole deep enough. Steady, now!"

"'Tis as large as Lac St. Pierre, and I have a stone as a spade. It fits the man I sent ahead of him," said a coarse voice, as the door creaked on its hinges. "After you, *mon officier*."

"*Sacré!* Art afraid to go first, coward? Step in. I will follow."

It is fair to believe that the two inwardly quaked as they crossed the threshold of what they believed to be the tomb of a murdered man. They being beyond me, I felt safe in lifting my head once more from behind the line of barrels, and saw the man with the light (he who had shot Peyrotte) enter the room followed by the officer, the half-soldier bringing up the rear. The candle flung its rays ahead, and, mingling with the cold gleam from the window, showed me the interior of the room I had left. To all appearances my stiffened body lay stretched on the mattress in the corner, the semblance being strikingly like that of a corpse wrapped in a blanket. It was gruesome even to me.

As the party cleared the sill and were fairly within the room, my new friend suddenly backed out, bringing the door with him, and in a trice he had bolted it, leaving the two within prisoners in my stead. "How will ye like the change?" he muttered, and then said openly: "Now, lad, be ye ready? There will be a devil o' a row presently, an' we have scant time to get off. Arter this you an' I be in the same pot."

As I saw the trick, and realized how neatly the tables had been turned on my jailers, it was hard to believe that I was yet in a perilous position. I felt that there should be no more for me to do than to walk upstairs

A Fair Exchange

and resume command of matters. Of course I would suddenly spring before De Mantel, taunt him for his failure, mark him quail at the fury of my eye, and then stab him with my sword, even as he had stabbed my father. • I was very young. The half-soldier's reference to there being scant time for us to escape and the implied hue and cry that would be raised steadied me somewhat. "How many are in the house?" I asked, as we hurried away.

"Dieskau came last night, an' three o' his staff to dance to him, along o' four men. Possibly ye know not that the saint that wants yer life (the count) was on the baron's staff, and the baron himself is well put out on account o' the loss of his chief butcher. The count will mention no names, and gives it out that the sword-thrust was taken in an affair of honour, as he calls it, and Dieskau has given him orders to join him at La Chevelure when he gets on his legs again. I think the baron an' his toy men go on the morrow. I hope so; 'twill be hard work to deceive them longer. Put on a bold front if ye meet any one. I wish yer body were as well fed as the spirit ye showed."

By this we reached the cellar stairs and went up, but even as we entered the empty kitchen the faint sounds of shouting and violent thumping from below met our ears.

"I' faith, they like not the fit o' the new shoe," said my guide, as we stopped to listen. "What a thrust in the ribs for the count when he hears o' it! All hell will be in his temper and at our heels. Come on."

We stole through the passage to the pantry, and from there to the dining-room. The gray light of dawn filled the apartment and made plain the disorder reigning therein. The table was covered with a confusion of plates and bottles, as though a feast had taken place—taken place in my own house while I was starving—and

The Strength of the Weak

on the floor, between two overturned chairs, lay the form of an officer. I looked at my guide with a question in my eye.

"Dead drunk," he whispered, and we crept into the hall.

The ticking of the great clock was all I heard, unless it might have been the thumping of my weakened heart (for I was but half-nourished), and we used the utmost caution as we tip-toed along to the room from which opened the back door. The half-soldier motioned me to halt as he softly undid the latch and looked in, then, beckoning me forward, we passed on. Curled up on a table lay a soldier, heavy with liquor, his musket along the floor and his snores sounding like the distant rumbling of wheels. My friend picked up the gun, softly unbarred the door, and we were in the outside air at last.

"Now fer the boats," he said. "We must play a red-skin game on 'em."

I thought little of danger then, or what it meant. I was filled with a sudden wonder at the breadth of the outside world, the sweet sense of unlimited space, the glory of motion, and the freshness of the early morning air. The soaked sod bent under my footsteps like a spring, the warm wet wind was a caress, and the sky like open arms welcoming me to liberty.

I followed my companion, walking boldly, until we came to the landing. Tied to the staging was a bateau, with two canoes trailing, evidently the property of the newcomers. The half-soldier unfastened the larger of the two canoes and motioned me in. In a moment we were going east, though not without many a backward glance on my part; and when we had passed the tongue of forest that hid us from the house, the course was changed, and we shot to the land at about the same spot where, a week before, I had pulled ashore with the half-drowned voyageur. As the light bark vessel touched

A Fair Exchange

the land, my guide, who had not spoken more than a word or two since leaving the house, said :

“ Now, my lad, lift her, an’ we’ll get her bestowed. I take it they’ll not think we took to water to go but a rifle-shot. We’ll hide her an’ then git to cover, after which ye can feed as becomes a man.”

We lifted the canoe and carried it into the gloomy depths of the wood, and, after much stumbling in the half-light, set it down some half a mile inland and under the ledge of a shelving rock. “ ’Tis small chance that it will be sought for here, unless they stumble over our trail,” said the half-soldier ; “ and water leaves no mark. Now we’ll back to the house.”

And back we went, cutting through the woods in a straight line, feeling our way through the deep undergrowth, yet with many a full stop, to be sure of our direction, until we came to the clearing where the mansion stood, a vast pile in the broadening light. There was no sign of life about the building, and as we were on the wrong side to hear aught of the prisoners, there was no knowing what might have befallen them. We skirted the clearing until we came opposite the outbuildings in the rear, and then my guide left the cover of the woods and made straight for the cow-house.

I had asked him many questions during the journey, but his answers were short even to curtness, like those of a man beset by worry, as, indeed, he must have been, being on the outlook for an enemy to be dreaded as much as those within the house, though I then knew nothing of it. Finally, he had told me to bother him no more, as the matter would be cleared up at one “ bilin’,” as he expressed it, and when we were in better state than we were then ; that he needed to work his wits without working his tongue, which latter might be dangerous, did I but know it.

The Strength of the Weak

And so I had come around to the fact that I was being mastered, and had better let my deliverer swing events without interference or questions of any sort. Thus I found myself a tenant of my own cow-house, and about to hide like a thief, with nothing to do but wonder and be thankful and pray for broad day.

It was still enough, save for the stamping of a cow now and then and the sound of soft munchings from the stalls about us. The warm smell of the brutes and the spicy aroma of the mow came strong upon me, bringing a sense of something long lost—perhaps my boyhood—but I was not to dream of the past then. My liberator carefully closed the door, and directing his voice into the gloomy interior, said loudly :

“*Un fait accompli!*”

This was evidently a signal, and so it proved, for immediately from over the edge of a bulwark of hay appeared the face of the *coureur-de-bois*, the man I had saved from drowning.

Then something of my mental blindness fell from me, and I saw very dimly into the past and, perhaps, by intuition, a trifle into the future.

From lack of food and proper rest and from nervous strain there was but little reaction left in me, and I have but a misty recollection of a greeting between my preserver and the voyageur as though they were old friends. Certain it was that nothing astonished me. There was something in the way of words of encouragement to myself and a reference to food ; but the bulk of the conversation was carried on in a low voice between the two, during which I several times caught the Indian name “*Abnakis*,” which was followed by a deep “damn” on the part of the voyageur.

But all I know clearly is that shortly I was buried to the neck in hay, with the voyageur close by my side, while my rescuer, bidding us remain quiet, left us.

A Fair Exchange

As the door closed and the sound of his footsteps died away, without preface, my new companion addressed me.

"We look to be in a different state than at our last meeting, Friend Chatsworthy—or Chatsworth. An' have ye given aught o' yer plans to Felix?"

"Felix?" I returned.

"Aye, to Felix," he answered, sharply. "Even the one but just agone."

"Nay, then," said I; "I know no Felix. I know only that I have been outraged, starved, imprisoned, and am now thus far free; and I am to thank him you call Felix for the last; but 'tis all a puzzle. As for plans, nay. I have no more plans than has a dried leaf in a gale. I am blown hither and thither. God send I settle before I am ground to dust." I think that here I let out a dry sob. "I only know that I must leave this place and seek for my mother, who will be in danger when she returns."

"Forgive me, my son, forgive me," he said, feeling for my hand, which he gripped warmly in his own. "Ye are but a mole in the sunlight an' weak for the lack o' meat; for the moment I forgot. Have no fears for madame, your good mother; neither think she will be back until the English flag flies over Quebec, an' that's long enough off. Ye know not Cadet nor Vaudreuil if ye look for her. They will not hurt her, but they will not let her from their eye or grasp yet awhile. Had she not willingly gone with Cadet 'tis more than like she would ha' been taken by force. Could not ye see she was lured away by the hope o' justice held out to her? Felix told me all. Moreover, does she look to find ye here? Does she not bid ye to William Johnson? What, lad, have I been reading askew? 'Tis little like me."

"How comes it you know all this?" I asked, won-

The Strength of the Weak

deringly, waked to a keen sense of interest regarding his knowledge of the letter to Johnson.

"Partly through knowing the powers that be an' their workings, but mostly by these," he answered, and fumbling in his shirt beneath the covering of hay, he pulled forth the missing papers and my mother's letter. "Never mind how I came by them," he continued, as he passed them to me. "I possess them fairly—fairly for times like these. But, to be short, I was hovering in the woods, with one eye on the watch for the Abnakis and the other for the girl——"

"Girl! What girl?" I interrupted.

"Girl! Aye, girl!" he repeated, with an accent of impatience, which changed as he continued. "'Fore God, man, ye be not even fledged in this week's doings! Give me scope that ye may get to the level o' common matters. As I say, I was scouting the woods when I saw ye let those things from the window, an' as all comin' from the great house was meat to me, as ye will know betimes, I laid hands on them ere they had cooled in the air outside. I thought little o' them, save that they were salved in a way out o' the common, until I saw what a pucker their loss had raised in that pig-faced butcher. An' so I read 'em, only to find out that ye were no turn-coat, as I had thought, and things were working askew with ye. To be frank, lad, when I first saw ye I hated ye for a renegade Englishman, although ye had saved my life, an' mighty glad was I to find out in these two papers that yer blood had not run backward in ye. Then Felix told me the rest, and the up-shot was that we planned to keep ye from starving and to git ye out, an' did both after a fashion. Now ye know something of it, my son, and the next for us to know is can we count on ye for help, an' if so, by the same token ye will be helpin' yerself. Did Felix tell ye Dieskau was within?"

A Fair Exchange

“Yes.”

“A good man, for a Frenchy. Well, he makes off this day, an’ when he is gone we will find a fairly clear field; an’ we must work, for there is much to do. Hist, now!”

At the exclamation he shifted himself deep into the hay, pressing me down with his hand; but beyond the soft noise of the cattle and the rustle caused by our own movements I heard no sound. For the space of what might have been a minute, though it seemed hours, we cowered silent and motionless. I had begun to think the woodsman’s ears had been at fault, as I heard nothing, and my mind wandered to my empty stomach which was sharply demanding attention, when the door of the cow-house opened. I heard the clatter of sabots on the loose floor below as a man entered, followed closely by a woman, and the two began talking in the vile patois of the habitant.

“It is a good boy you are, Paul. I must have some warm milk for the grand folk, and you will get it for me. There is a fine cursing time at the house about the captain and his men having gone off without orders, and may Satan go with them, and——”

“Bother me not with your troubles,” returned the man. “Have I not my own? Not a cow to grass for three days, and every udder well-nigh as dry as thy old palm, Jeanette.”

“Thou liest, Paul. Thou hast been stealing milk of the seigneur. Who ever knew of a cow going dry in spring-time, even on hay? Thou art a filcher. Get me milk at once!”

“Then why did the seigneur turn traitor and Peyrotte go away without a word, an’ he dressed, as they say, like a marshal of France? And the madame gone also. Will I have a roof over the heads of the wife and child this day week? St. Maurice knows; and I behind in

The Strength of the Weak

tithes since last Candlemas. God, what times! Is the new lord hard, Jeanette? How fares he?"

"I know naught only from his valet, Felix, who wishes an extra loaf an' a bit of meat each day. A vain-spoken man, Paul, who tickles my chin and swears I look like his young sister, who serves his worship the bishop, in Quebec. And he makes so much of the lower house, Paul, and eats his meals there, too, for the coolness of it, he says. What a man! He has grown great in his demands, and stands even now in the kitchen with a bare knife and a pistol at his hip, and swears that none shall cook for the grand company save himself. Did I not tell thee last night of the great baron of France? Ah! but he and his train are so fine, Paul, and they wish their *déjeuner* this instant, so that they may be off. But the new seigneur is faring well, praise the Virgin! And only think, the young master was trying to kill him, a king's officer, as I told thee once, Paul. Oh, get the milk, thou good boy! I fear the tongue of Felix."

"Thou must know that which goes on, Jeanette. What did the young seigneur against the king—he and Peyrotte?"

"Did he not cross swords with the king's own man, thou fish's head with open mouth, and flout M'sieur Cadet and steal matters from his master, the new lord? I was told all; but I see nothing, for when I finish my work I am bundled out, and can gather little. Stare no more, but squeeze the cattle in turn, that I may have my milk and thou thy head. Dost hear?"

"Well, well, what ere comes gives ease to some," returned the man, as he clattered into a stall. "'Tis the life of a lord we lead since Peyrotte is not by. But there's none too much good to come, Jeanette. Say naught, but bad is soon to happen. I saw the Evil One last night in the orchard. He took the shape of an Algonquin, with great white wings, and chased me

A Fair Exchange

through the young corn of the field. I threw the sign of the cross at him, and he fled in turn. I fear the war grows loud with these happenings and the many soldiers about. But thou art free from danger, Jeanette, even though thou wear a beard on thy chin."

"'Tis more than thou hast, then, with thy chin like a calf's nose, thou dolt; and thy Evil One comes from the wine-pot," retorted the woman, as she waited for her milk. And that is all I heard, beyond some low muttering, for soon after the woman hurried off. The man pulled down some hay to the cattle below, and then leisurely enough went his way to idleness and his unwonted freedom, leaving the cow-house door wide open.

Now, from the foregoing I had gathered a thing or two. I had learned of the lie which had been spread among the tenantry anent the disappearance of my mother and Peyrotte, of my own treason to the king, De Mantel's improvement, of the certainty of Baron Dieskau's intended departure, and of the important fact that the officer and soldier who had gone to bury me were yet below, while my rescuer was on guard in the kitchen. The temerity of the man called Felix astonished me, and the peculiar position he appeared to hold with both my enemy and my newly found friend perplexed me. It was a tangle the unravelling of which was at present beyond my poor brain. I only wondered what his next move would be.

But wondering neither fed me nor eased my anxiety, albeit the latter was somewhat lightened by the stout partisan at my side. But he vouchsafed no word to me, seemingly being in deep thought, which I deemed best not to disturb by questions. The silence came down like a cloud, finally smothering my senses, and at last, feeling no fear for my immediate safety, I slept the sleep of exhaustion.

CHAPTER XI

IN THE CHÂTEAU

WHEN I awoke the sun was shining between the boards of the building in great lances of light filled with motes and dancing insects. I was startled to find myself alone and to mark how late it was, for by the slant of the lines of radiance which shot across the mow like the bars of a luminous gridiron, I knew it was close upon high noon. A sound of distant voices came to me as I gathered my wits, and, pulling myself from my nest, I peered through a crack between the boards. The view opened south, and from my height I could see the manor-house, the landing-place beyond, and still beyond sparkled the waters of the lake, a fine blue haze shutting out the distance. A party of officers were on their way to the boats, and I surmised, both by the brilliancy of their white uniforms and the freedom of the laugh that came from them, that it was the Baron Dieskau and his staff leaving the place.

It was an hour or more before they swung on to the bosom of the lake and disappeared, a great ado having been made before they finally embarked and started. But hardly had the bateau passed from sight when I saw the half-soldier coming hurriedly from the back door and towards me. When he came to the cow-house he lifted up his voice like one who has no fears, and called to me. "Faith, did ye think I was goin' to starve ye?" he asked, as I joined him. "Small wonder if ye did. I thought they would never be gone, for much fuss was

In the Château

raised over the loss of the canoe we stole, an' 'tis thought that those locked below have deserted an' taken her. Come, now, an' feast, an' then be ready to act, for we start on our journey this night, God willin'."

I followed him somewhat weakly, and he led me openly to the house and into the great dining-room. I was sufficiently light-headed, but I marked the table all in disorder, as it was when we passed through the room in the gray of the dawn. The figure of the drunken officer was gone from beneath the table, but sitting thereat and eating like a hungry wolf was the voyageur, the now brilliant light showing him to be well-nigh as gaunt and hollow-eyed as myself. He gave me no more of a greeting than to wave his knife towards a chair and fill his mouth from the plate before him; then, with his speech muffled by his food, he said in English:

"A-ha, my worthy *ci-devant* French seigneur, there's a virtue in food and a goodliness that ye will soon know about. Lay to an' act; there is time for tongue work later.' Ye see ye were not deserted."

My craving was great, and, without answering, I fell into a chair and set about the business before me. And how we both ate! My companion had enormous capacity, and filled it, while I made a fair second. At the beginning the half-soldier had gone out, and we finished our repast without a word to interfere, the only sounds being the working of our jaws, the clicking of knives and forks, and the sucking report of a freshly drawn cork. At length I was full to bursting, but there was a spirit in me (perhaps from the generous quantity of food, perhaps from the wine, yet, methinks, perhaps, from the presence of a friend) I had not known for many a day. The glances I had cast at my companion showed that he was in a serious mood, as one who was conning his duty and feeding his stomach at once. His face, haggard as it was, became a passport to my good opin-

The Strength of the Weak

ion : to more than that—to absolute trust. He was something more than a worthless wood-rover whose life I had saved, and I saw, or fancied I saw, a man of strength in mind as well as body, one rich in resource, one who dominated his fellows, as even now, primed as I was, he was unconsciously dominating me. And what puzzled me was the fact that I could have sworn I had seen and spoken with him long since and upon some great occasion, though for the life of me I could not think where it had chanced. As I pushed back my chair he did the same, bringing his dark eye to bear sharply upon me ; then, with an easy quickness which seemed to be a part of him, he said :

“ Have ye decided to cast your lot with us, Friend Chatsworth ? We were cut off by interruption an’ sleep at our last talk, an’ ye rested so sweetly that I had no heart to break in on ye this morning. I tell ye, lad, we be now in the lions’ den, though the mouth of the beast is blocked for a few hours, an’ there is much to be done. Now say your say, for I be a man of action, an’ have little patience with those that turn over a plain problem till ’tis worn thin. Think me not crusty, lad ; I owe ye as much as my life, but it is the lives of more than we two that hang at stake now. Will ye go ? ”

“ I will go gladly. There is nothing else for me to do,” I answered shortly, whereat he held out his hand and gave me a grip that wrung a cry from me.

“ I hear ’twas in this very room that ye showed your fighting mettle, and, according to Felix, I have little doubt that ye will be an acquisition. Is aught wrong, Felix ? ” he said, turning to the half-soldier, who at that moment entered the room.

“ They be trying the upper door with a knife,” answered that worthy. “ The third man has likely let them free from the cell, but they be well boxed yet, though they have the run o’ all below.”

In the Château

"The third man!" I exclaimed. "There came but two to bury me besides yourself."

"Aye, but Felix despatched the third man below to find if the two were there, for it was the only way to be rid o' him without bloodletting. He's safe with the others," answered Spaulding. "As for the knife," he continued, "they may whittle the oak for a week and not give room for a mouse to get through. Have ye marked aught of the Abnakis?" he asked, his face clouding.

"Not a sign," was the answer.

"Yet the varmint is about," asserted the voyageur, "for I gathered that from the jabber of the peasants in the barn this morning. The 'Algonquin with the wings,' the fool feared, was doubtless the red-skin bent on some devilry—mayhap the hen-roost; but I like not his hanging about. I fear that treacherous devil more than a platoon of soldiery. Out of this we must get ere he can bring force against us, for he will never rest until he finishes the job he began in the canoe. He knows what I am to him from now on—the snake. Now up with ye both. Ye know the house above, Chatsworth. Get what ye list, if it be not too much. The count is safe under lock and key and the rest are below. I will look to the girl—and—St. Sebastian! what's that?"

The exclamation was drawn from him by the sound of a dull blow or a muffled explosion, followed by another and another, the noise apparently coming from the kitchen. The voyageur sprang to his feet and hurried through the pantry passage, closely followed by Felix and myself. On reaching the kitchen nothing out of the common could be seen, but we had looked about us for less than ten seconds when the cellar-door sprung under a terrific blow, and at once the situation was clear. The prisoners below had assaulted the heavy oak, their

The Strength of the Weak

last bar from liberty, and by the way the planking bulged at each stroke it was likely to hold together but a few moments longer. It was plain that the door was being rammed by some heavy object.

I looked at Spaulding. No sign of a panic was on him, but his face, which had held a benign expression but a little time before, now took on a hardness that made me thankful that his anger was not directed against myself.

"They be using the log," said Felix; "and had they not been French 'twould ha' been thought of long since."

"Then blood may flow, though I regret it," returned the voyageur. "Give me the gun, Felix. Now ye two get what eatables ye may find and carry all to the hall. If they break out we can keep them to this room for a time, for the doors be heavy and the windows barred. Come both if ye hear a shot, and come armed. We will try to get out o' this without bloodletting, as they have but a sword between them. I will parley at the first splinter. Away with ye!"

As he spoke, or rather shouted, the last words, the blows began again, and ere we could make a step to accomplish the task of despoiling the store-room there came a crash, and through the lower panel of the door stuck out the butt of a log, and there it hung as though jammed. Feeling that the end was at hand, and being entirely defenceless, I ran to the dining-room, seized a sword from its slings over the fireplace, and hurried back to the kitchen. As I cleared the threshold I saw the voyageur bent to the opening, and heard him say in French:

"No terms, m'sieur. If you break out or further try to leave the cellar you will be shot at sight."

"Who are you?" came a voice.

"A loyal officer of his Majesty, George the Second of England, and all in this house be prisoners."

In the Château

"Mother of God, m'sieur! We heard no shot. When was the house attacked and by whom?"

"In the heart of an enemy's country the knife is better than the bullet," answered Spaulding. "I will be frank, m'sieur. You have heard of Roger's Rangers? Well, we came this morning. Our stay is necessarily short. Is it enough?"

There was no answer for a moment, but I could hear voices from beyond the door, as though in consultation. Then again the spokesman asked:

"Is the baron with you?"

Spaulding turned to me and winked one eye as he answered: "We have him and his train. He was our quarry. Return below, m'sieur; the parley is too long."

"*Mon Dieu! Oh, mon Dieu!*" came plainly from the cellar stairs. Then, in tones of emotion: "Where is the traitor who locked us below?"

"I know no traitor, m'sieur. What was he like? We have slain a man."

"Felix, I think his name; valet to the Count de Lune."

Spaulding's face fell into a broad smile, the first I had seen, and suppressing a chuckle, he answered:

"Ah, Felix, I think I heard the count call him! Aye, he lies dead in the count's room. The count is a prisoner along with his daughter."

"*Sacré!* I thought to have Felix for myself. Where is the one he set free?"

"I know not who you mean, m'sieur, unless it be the lord of the manor—a non-combatant. He departed early this morning. Will you retire, or shall I order a discharge through the door?"

"We surrender, m'sieur. What will you do with us?"

"Keep you where you are until help arrives, then

The Strength of the Weak

treat you as honourable prisoners if you so bear yourselves. Your answer at once, m'sieur."

"Give us food and drink."

"In an hour. Return below at once and no more words."

"In an hour?"

"In an hour."

There were sounds of descending footsteps, and the voyageur rose. "Let them feed on that. Could ye lie neater, Chatsworth? Now to work; it must be a short shift."

And a short shift it was, though it was nearer two hours than one ere we had packed a small hamper and gathered such arms and ammunition as could be taken. There had been a fourth soldier, but Felix told me that the fellow had been sent to Montreal three days before, to report to Cadet and escort back a bateau, by which De Mantel could be taken to Quebec in great comfort. I learned that my enemy (for so I thought of him, and by no other name) had fairly recovered from his wound, though he still kept to his room, and had been made a prisoner by the simple expedient of turning the key in his door, all his arms having been previously removed by stealth. His daughter had seen her father but once since the tragedy, and did not appear desirous of a second interview. These facts I received disjointedly, for Felix and I came together but for a moment or two while we were at work, the voyageur remaining on guard at the broken door. The house above being safe, I ran over it hurriedly in my hunt for necessities. My mother's room, like mine, was in a state of wreck, and the whole upper as well as the lower part of the house had been made free with during the term of my imprisonment.

I felt as well as saw the change. It was a period put to my old life of ease, the sudden upheaval that had

In the Château

interposed a line between the boy and the man. Home and its comforts were matters of years ago, and in their places stalked the ghost of desolation. It gripped my heart to note the change, and a sense of depression—homesickness and mother-sickness—crept over me as I put into a small packet the few essentials I gathered from the débris of my belongings. Yet, paradoxical as the statement may seem, I was elated, and with no cause that I could see save that I was no longer buried in a prison. Though I had escaped from a dungeon, I found myself still beset with danger, and perhaps I breasted it without a failure of courage because I knew I was not breasting it alone; perhaps, moreover, it was something the unknown spirit of fate breathed into me which seemed to lift me, and perhaps, more than all, it was wrath that buoyed me, for minute by minute my gorge waxed higher as I witnessed the complete disruption of my home, all caused by the invasion into it of the arch villain who at that moment lay in a room below me. I had seemingly lost and De Mantel had gained. I knew my estate would now be confiscated and I would be a wanderer. I knew I was parted, perhaps forever, from my mother, and even then that I was looking for the last time on the familiar rooms of a home which was but a name; yet, withal, I felt a spring and clearness to my mind and body mingling with the sense of my fallen fortunes. At the late time of life in which I am writing I see clearly that great events had shaped themselves around me as though my petty self and interests were the centre about which revolved a whirlwind of human passion.

But at that juncture I had little time to dream—though essentially I am and was a dreamer—therefore I hastened to join my companions below, knowing that at any time the prisoners might suspect a trick and cause trouble.

CHAPTER XII

TEMPTED BY THE DEVIL

As I descended the stairs and came opposite the door of the guest-chamber, in which I knew De Mantel was confined, I hesitated. In the whirl of recent events I had given him but a passing thought, only in a vague way connecting him with my unfortunate state, while realizing he was now powerless, and I had gone my way without even a glance at his door. But the sight of the house above, the havoc that had taken place, or it might have been the food which I had so plentifully eaten, strengthened the animal in me. I only know that for the nonce I lost my habitual timidity, for when I was about to pass his quarters the devil that lurks in every human heart got to the surface in mine. The man who had murdered my father, who had the same as murdered Peyrotte, who had attempted to murder me, and who had wrecked my mother's peace and made her a widow was close under my hand and in my power for the time being. So thoroughly was he at my disposal, that I had but to turn the key which lay temptingly in the lock, enter, and with a sword-thrust rid the world of a villain. Who would gainsay my right? I admit I had no thought of bettering the world by hurrying from it a monster black with crime and cruelty, neither did I consider the cowardice of my meditated act. I had been galled to the core by this man. I had been rendered fatherless, well-nigh motherless, and entirely

Tempted by the Devil

homeless by his hand. There was time enough; a minute would do, and who could question or thwart me?

As I stood looking at the heavy panels, stronger and stronger grew my wild hatred and wilder desire to cancel the account between us; so strong, indeed, that I let fall my small bundle, drew the rapier which I had bound to my waist, and laid my hand on the key. To my astonishment it refused to turn in the lock. Although from what Felix had told me I believed the man within to be totally unarmed, I knew enough of him to feel the necessity of taking him by surprise. To fumble with the key (if he had discovered himself to be a prisoner) would possibly put him on his guard, and, as a precautionary move, I placed my ear to the door. A prisoner though he might be, I at once discovered that he was not alone, for plainly to my ear came a woman's voice, though too muffled by the thick wood for me to distinguish a word. My first thought was of treachery, and it was immediately strengthened as I discovered that even under the slight pressure against the door, it swung noiselessly inward, showing it to have been unfastened. Though the sound of the voice was now clear, I could see neither the speaker nor De Mantel, for before me, betwixt the bed and the door, stood a long and high-backed, carved settle, which was evidently being used as a screen. As I took one silent stride into the room I was halted by De Mantel's voice, which, strained to my purpose as I had been, came so pat on the situation, that I thought it directed to myself.

"Why did you come here unbidden?"

I stopped short and looked about me to see from what point he could have marked my entry.

In self-defence, I will say I was out of my element. Stealth and hatred had hitherto been strangers to my character, and betwixt suppressed excitement, a meed of pure nervousness, and the outrage I was doing my

The Strength of the Weak

conscience, my mind was in no way fitted to the emergency of being halted by my intended but unseen victim. Nor was I quieted by the fancied security of my position, when, as I turned, I beheld a crouching figure with drawn sword confronting me. Without a sound, but with the instinct of a trained swordsman, I threw myself into position to receive him, at which, as if to take my attack, my opposite did the same, and for a space we thus faced each other, the blood tingling in my cheeks and my knees shaking from both shock and physical weakness. It was a supreme moment for me, one of the few I look back upon with a smile and a shudder at once, for as I faced my supposed enemy a certain movement or a gleam of intelligence cleared the matter before me, and I found I was but confronting my own image, which was reflected in a large cheval mirror standing in the half-light of the corner behind the door, a mirror the presence and position of which was as familiar to me as my own right hand. But the shock of this discovery was as nothing to the emotion which immediately overwhelmed me. I dropped my point with an inward groan. Could that have been the image of my mother's son, that white-faced, haggard thing with a bared blade and the stoop of an assassin, a sneaking coward with hate written on every feature? My conscience could never have unfolded itself and showed me my own soul as did the glass which Providence might have placed there to protect me against myself. I looked with horror on my own portrait. I saw the brand of Cain upon me; but in the midst of this revulsion of spirit, which might have taken but a quarter of a second, I caught the voice of the girl, who had answered the speaker.

That she was a girl, and a young girl, I knew by the clearness, softness, yet youthful ring of her tone, and I knew, too, that not to me had De Mantel directed his

Tempted by the Devil

question. Before I had gathered the import of her words I imagined that his daughter had entered his room and would in some manner aid his escape; but I was soon disabused of the idea as well as broadly enlightened on another matter, as her answer to him held small token of love, filial or otherwise.

"I well know my recklessness, m'sieur, but I will not have you misunderstand my motive. I have come against my better judgment and the known will of my brother. If he knew——"

"Why the d——l," interrupted De Mantel, "are you harking back to your childhood? What is your brother to me, and who knows that he lives? Your presence is welcome; you are at last falling into my wishes and coming without waiting to be sent for, but you will oblige me by leaving boredom at the door."

"Hear me through, m'sieur, that there may be no misunderstanding on the part of either," replied the woman, her voice growing louder. "I have taxed myself to come to you, and I come not at your bidding. I have great news for you. I am about to leave you. I have appeared tame in your hands, but it was through knowing that this spot was but a rendezvous; that in this house we would part. You are no longer my master——"

"Jessie, what cursed madness has fastened to you?" exclaimed De Mantel, evidently starting up from the bed on which he had been lying.

"Nay, m'sieur, remain where you are unless you wish to test me in extremity. You are astonished, doubtless, but you will be still further so. I tell you we are about to part. I may have something to thank you for, but it will not be for the good you intended me. It is true I have more learning than I would have acquired in my father's house had I not been stolen therefrom. For that I thank you; but for the rest—I know

The Strength of the Weak

what you would have me be to you. I know to what end my training pointed. I know—aye, I have known for weeks why I was to be confined in a convent—a holy house. It was that I might be kept safely while you were in the colonies, that in the end you might fulfil a most unholy purpose. See, I am armed. I could kill you as you lie, and I would have done it long since without counting the cost to myself, only I hoped for this ending. But now I am armed only for defence; your life hangs on the wills of others who love you even less than I——”

“The girl has gone mad!” interrupted the invalid. “Jessie, as I love you, I beseech you to lay aside that pistol and speak like yourself. Why this comedy to me? Am I used to find pleasure in mummery?”

“Love! Comedy!” echoed the girl, with fine scorn in her voice. “Hear me through that you may be rid of the use of either word. Your love is of the kind that drifts uppermost in the base; you misspell your term; it is most vile. We have nothing in common, m’sieur, and, heaven be thanked, I am at last in a position to tell you so. You do not know how strong I am. God forgive me for feeling the joy that comes from revenge, but I have risked entering here for that. Listen to more comedy. You do not know and, even knowing, cannot alter the fact that this house is no longer in your hands; that you—even you are a prisoner, as are your men; that my brother is now down-stairs, and that the young lord of the manor——”

“Hell and furies!” shouted the officer, leaping to his feet. “Treason to me! Felix—Felix, I say!”

But he got no farther. Before I could take a step forward to flank the settle that obstructed my view of the couple there came a suppressed scream from the woman, and as I cleared the obstruction the girl rushed past me into the hall, where she would have been fol-

Tempted by the Devil

lowed by her persecutor had I not faced him, checking him with the point of my rapier, which he almost ran upon. As he caught sight of me, he staggered back and stood blinking, as though my face was a light that dazzled him.

CHAPTER XIII

AT BAY

HAD I been possessed of the mood which had held me three minutes before, I would probably have run him through as he stood, but the exposition of my former cowardice and passion, the revolution of self that had followed it, and the words of the girl, made me face him in a different spirit. While before I was murderous and vengeful, now I felt but triumphant, and drew in sufficient satisfaction with that knowledge. His appearance, too, demanded some pity. His wound and sickness had paled and thinned him, and the fact that he was but half-dressed and unkempt somewhat exaggerated his aspect of helplessness. I expected the man to wilt at the sight of me, but beyond the signs of momentary surprise he showed no emotion. He backed a pace or so, as I have said, and after scanning me quickly, albeit his eyes roved about the room as if in search of arms, the excitement he had shown fell from him, and, with an effort at indolent assurance, he folded his arms and spoke :

“ Ah, this backing accounts for the wench’s bravery ! I was fool enough to think the girl demented. It is true, then, the tables are turned. Have you come like a coward to finish the business on an unarmed and wounded man ? ”

“ We fight fire with fire here in Canada, m’sieur,” I answered, quietly, though with effort greater than his own. “ It was a coward’s blow that took my father’s

At Bay

life, and had the girl not spoken, or had I not overheard her, it is like that by this I would have dealt a coward's blow to you. Have you a sword that we may settle the matter? Though even then, m'sieur, I am frank enough to say that I shall have you at my mercy, which has not grown tender on the diet you have furnished me. Quick, m'sieur, I am somewhat hurried."

"For an Englishman you are a warm-blooded fish, and not of the stripe I had counted on," he replied. "Still, one of us must be the victim. I have no sword, however, and it appears that in some way I have been outwitted. Will you kindly explain the situation?"

"There is little to explain," I exclaimed, endeavouring to emulate his supreme coolness. "You had the gist of the situation from the girl. I was fed by Felix, liberated by Felix, and by Felix were your men imprisoned in the cellar in my stead. It was also Felix who disarmed you and made you a prisoner."

"Ah!" came the calm rejoinder, though his face flushed with sudden anger. "By Felix and by Felix. It appears reasonable. Well, what now?"

"What now!" I returned, bewildered for the moment. "M'sieur, I entered this room to kill you for what you have done, but I could not bring myself to do it in cold blood. I was, however, fortunate enough to be of assistance to the lady. You will be dealt with fairly, but the end will be the same."

"It is considerate of you to spare me," he answered, with a shrug of his shoulders as he turned and seated himself on the edge of his couch. "As you lack the nerve of a man, is it beyond possibility to compromise this matter?"

"Compromise, you villain! How?" I vociferated, exasperated at his *sang-froid* and losing control of myself.

"You are but a boy to pass your temper from com-

The Strength of the Weak

mand," he said, easily. "Come, m'sieur, you have the handle of the sword at present, but not the character to use it. Your so-called proofs against me can only be bald statements without backing. Suppose we leave the question of your rights to the courts."

"M'sieur de Mantel," I began.

"The Count de Lune," he interrupted.

"Whatever you be, then. Are you still fool enough to think me capable of compounding a felony against all I hold dearest? Are you feeling your way? Then let it be known that the proofs against you are damning. You were the cause of Peyrotte's death. You murdered my father. You have attempted to rob me of my liberty and my estate. You have wrecked my home, and now you ask a compromise because, forsooth, I do not kill you offhand. I have read you aright, m'sieur; I read you now. You would know how much I know. Know then that on my person are the proofs for which you searched so long and which will damn you by the laws of man as you are already damned by the Almighty."

At this tirade his face flamed an instant, but he remained unmoved as he said:

"You are lying to me. Why will you not treat with me as man to man? I have offered terms, and will leave you in peace until the law decides our case. You have some cause for displeasure. I admit as much; but why not take vengeance at once instead of threatening me with papers the value of which was nothing and which have been destroyed."

Carried away by the excitement of the moment and my ascendant position, for answer I was about to thrust my hand into my pocket and shake the papers in his face when I was seized violently from behind and swung from my position, while Spaulding, who had entered the room, said severely:

At Bay

"Shame on ye, Chatsworth, to attack a fallen man. I sent ye above to work an' not to do murder; besides, he is my meat first."

Betwixt the boyishness of my contemplated action and the degradation of my intended guilt, I was as crest-fallen by Spaulding's arraignment as though I had been caught in some mean act. Nor did he give me a chance to explain, for, directing his attention to De Mantel, he said in English:

"I am Leonard Spaulding, of whom ye know, doubtless, though we never before met, an' ye may thank God for the nature he gave me—that is, to think ere striking. I have ye at last. What have ye to say?"

Instead of quailing, De Mantel looked with a black scowl at the woodsman, and answered him with the same easy insolence that had marked his manner to me. "Well, what is *your* grievance, my uncouth friend? Heaven and hell seem leagued to annoy me to-day. Are you indeed the brother of Jessie? I little thought she sprung from such a social depth."

Spaulding's chest heaved once or twice in his effort at self-containment, but he fell into the apparent calm of his opponent, and answered as easily:

"Aye, I am indeed the brother of Jessie, and little comfort ye may gather from it."

"Then you have much to thank me for," answered the Frenchman, with an insufferable air of being bored. "I was not her abductor, but I have been her protector; she will undoubtedly inform you of as much if she be not lacking in gratitude. Now, what is your personal grievance, my friend?"

"Faith, Chatsworth," said Spaulding, turning to me, "saw ye ever such a smooth villain? I almost regret I interrupted ye, only we both have need o' him. Have ye the means o' writin' hereabouts?"

Partly sulking under my late undeserved wiggling

The Strength of the Weak

and partly puzzled by his demand, I simply pointed to the well-stocked desk, evidently but recently used, which stood by a window facing the lake. He nodded approval, without noticing my demeanour, and again addressing De Mantel, he said :

"Ye are breathing at this moment, m'sieur, though by your acts you have long since forfeited the right to the use of God's air. Do ye care to continue to use it?"

"I have no intention of relinquishing the right, nor will I, unless you take advantage of your present strength and my own weakness," returned De Mantel, without observable change in his manner.

"Ye grant my power, do ye?"

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders with the ghost of a sneer on his face, but he made no reply.

"Very well," continued the woodsman, changing from English to French. "Putting that aside, are you not a captain on the staff of the Baron Dieskau, and were you not to join him on an expedition against Oswego?"

There was no answer.

"Well, you might have done so, only that orders came directing the French army of occupation to go to La Chevelure, which is threatened and will probably be taken by the English. You were to be given a command and had orders to re-enforce Ticonderoga. Am I not right?"

The Frenchman straightened himself, and for a moment his insolent expression was lost in one of genuine astonishment. "Where in the d——l's name——"

"I have your record in a bottle, my friend," interrupted the voyageur. "I have been on your trail for months, but until now could not get my hands on you; but you may see that here I am reaping the fruits of patience. You have, or had, a valet, Felix by name. Well, Felix was and is invaluable to me. Do you see the drift of the point?"

At Bay

A black scowl was the answer, while Spaulding went on.

"Moreover, were you not to join Dieskau at Quebec, where you were to place my sister in a convent, that she might still be to your hand when you returned, and would it not have all come about, perhaps, had it not been for Felix, or had you not met with a pretty prick in the ribs? It makes little difference, I should have had you anyway."

If Spaulding's spirit had been of the meanest order, he could not have planned a more malicious revenge for past wrongs. The most violent hatred shone from De Mantel's eyes, and by the muscles of his face I could see that his teeth were tightly clinched.

Far from gloating in triumph over his victim, the expression of the voyageur's face had changed to one that smacked strangely of pity as he silently looked down at De Mantel, as though waiting for an answer. Finally, he ended his scrutiny with an interrogative "Well?"

De Mantel arose to his feet and drew himself to his full height. The brilliant light from the south fell strongly on his working features. With a glance through the window at the world without, he half-closed his eyes and returned:

"M'sieur, I am Captain Armand de Mantel, the Count de Lune, and am upon the staff of General the Baron Dieskau. Yet I will waive the difference in rank between us and give you satisfaction. Will you procure me a sword?"

This, like the foregoing, was said in French, and as De Mantel ceased speaking, the voyageur's face changed in a twinkling, and he laughed aloud as he replied in his colonial English, which was not nearly as pure as his French:

"Faith, sir count or captain, as ye may be, and a fool that ye surely are if ye take me for one. Do ye think I

The Strength of the Weak

am looking to clear my honour, or that ye could whiten your black heart by spillin' my blood? Is it for ye to make tarms with Leonard Spaulding? Nay, nay, sir count. Ye live now because I let ye, and mayhap ye may live awhile yet if ye do my bidding. There is somewhat too much of this palaver. Get ye to the desk yonder an' write out a pass for Leonard Spaulding, his sister, an' two attendants to the head-quarters of the Baron Dieskau at La Chevelure, and sign your official name."

"And if I do?"

"Then ye may live to hang yourself, for I will have all I want of ye."

"And if I do not?"

"Then may God ha' mercy on ye."

"You have no gentility, m'sieur; you are uncouth," was the answer. "I would not have my life taken by one of the *canaille*. I will give you such a pass. We will meet, perhaps, at some future day. To-day I will admit I am in your power and you offer me no recourse. Come in an hour; you shall have the paper."

"I offered ye life or death, and I am frank to say that ye relieve me by choosing the first," said Spaulding. "But there will be no hour about it—scarcely minutes. Get to the desk at once."

"And you will give me liberty for it?"

"Aye, when we are off."

De Mantel turned slowly and leisurely and sat himself at the desk. He drew a sheet of paper towards him, and then reaching for a quill, pressed it forcibly against the wood in such a manner as to destroy its nib. Throwing it from him, he arose from his seat, saying:

"M'sieur, I am too agitated with the events of the day to either compose or write, but it will give me great pleasure to sign if M'sieur Chatsworth will place that which you wish upon the paper."

At Bay

His air of insolence was gaining on him again, and this, with his dilatory actions and a certain quick shifting of his eye, made me suspicious of trickery, though how he could withstand two armed men, himself being without means of offence or defence, or how he could gain advantage by gaining time (which seemed plainly his object) was more than I then saw. I saw in a moment, however.

Without waiting for directions, I seated myself, grasped the remaining pen, and, under the dictation of the woodsman, wrote the following:

“ Pass the bearer, his sister, and two male attendants, be they on land or on water, to Fort La Chevelure (the scalping-place) or to such point as may be the headquarters of General the Baron Dieskau.

“ Seigneury De Mantel,
“ June, 1755.”

This unmilitary safe-conduct was read aloud, after which Spaulding took the pen and handed it to De Mantel. He received it with a peculiar expression, and was about to speak when from the hall there came the sound of light steps, and Spaulding's sister (for now I knew the relation) stood in the doorway. In a loud, clear voice she cried:

“ Brother Leonard, yonder comes a boat-load. Mayhap they are for the house, for I can see the French soldiers.”

Even under the shock of this intelligence I was held for a moment by the sight of the girl as she was framed by the opening. When she fled by me, shortly before, I had taken no note of her details; but now, even under the stress of what was possibly an approaching danger, I marked her minutely, and that, too, in the space of but a few seconds. Her figure seemed more negative than

The Strength of the Weak

positive, but the effect was something more than pleasing. Her complexion was dark, possibly, I thought, from long exposure to the sun and wind. She wore a costume but half-civilized, for the skirt and upper garment smacked strongly of the freedom of the Indian woman, and her feet were encased in moccasins. No wonder her step had been light. For the rest, I saw her eyes were brown and of a depth that one rarely sees. The same expression that had attracted me to her brother lay in her eyes, and as I looked at her a great light broke on me, but then was not the time for me to verify a suspicion that had come to me.

Spaulding had gone to the window, and after my brief survey of his sister I followed. Above the trees to the east, though still distant, I could plainly see a bateau approaching, and that it contained soldiers was apparent by the way the sun shot sparks from the polished metal of their arms. Their number I could not make out; but Spaulding evidently fathomed the matter at a glance, for he said: "Six, and an officer."

De Mantel laughed aloud.

There was an ugly gathering on the brows of the voyageur as he turned to the exulting Frenchman, who, it was now clear, had discovered the boat some moments before. To him it was fairly a rescue.

"Sign this paper at once, m'sieur."

De Mantel looked up defiantly, and, deliberately breaking the pen, sneered in Spaulding's face.

"Not now, M'sieur Englishman. The game is mine."

The voyageur made no outburst. He did not even answer his victim, but, turning to his sister, said quietly:

"Go back to your room, Jessie. Watch them, and when they are about to land let me know, but do not come here before. We have yet more than half an hour. Chatsworth, bar the front and rear doors below, and tell

At Bay

Felix to come to me ; the prisoners are safe to remain quiet a while longer."

Saying this he drew his pistol from his belt, and without questioning him, yet with the idea that I would hear the report of the firearm ere I could return, I left the room, bowed myself past the damsel, who still stood in the hall, and hurried below.

CHAPTER XIV

THE DEVIL CARES FOR HIS OWN

FELIX was sitting cross-legged on the floor of the kitchen watching the splintered cellar-door as intently as a cat watches a mouse-hole. He nodded when I delivered my message, and silently getting to his feet, left the room, while I fastened the doors leading into the dining-room and hall. If the prisoners broke from the cellar they would be as far from liberty as before, but they might become an element of danger should they discover and communicate with the party which was undoubtedly making for the seigneury; for the window, though barred, presented a broad outlook, and its sill was not more than eight feet above the ground. I trusted that their impatience would not lead them to another assault, or even to question their supposed guard, else they would soon discover the weakness of their present prison. The tower doors I found secure, and the rear door was rendered so when I dropped its heavy bar into place and turned the key in the lock. Then I hastened upstairs.

Undoubtedly my plain duty was to have remained below and acted in the place of Felix, but upon that point my orders had not been explicit. Over me there had come a certain nervous dread bound to a sense of loneliness as my footsteps echoed along the great hall. I know not why they echoed more then than during the years before, but to me the hall had never seemed so long, so wide, or so lonesome. It accentuated my feel-

The Devil Cares for His Own

ing of desertion. The soles of my feet itched. The Frenchmen below, harmless enough in their present state, loomed into a mountain of menace, and I trod the floor, over which I fairly fled, as though beneath me was a mine of gunpowder or some waiting terror. When I arrived above, the tower room door was open, and I could see the girl standing at her window watching the coming boat. I hesitated a moment, thinking of speaking to her, but she appeared so unconscious of my near presence that I passed on into the guest-chamber. De Mantel sat at the desk with folded arms, Spaulding was looking from the window, and Felix stood in the centre of the room. As I entered the voyageur turned about and addressed his prisoner.

"I fancy, m'sieur, ye think I lack the mettle to do more than threaten. I have dealt easy with ye; God alone knows why, for ye deserve little consideration; but now the boat, which it seems has stiffened your will, stiffens mine as well. I ask ye once more. Will ye sign the pass?"

"No, m'sieur."

"Nay, then, think twice."

"*Sacré!* M'sieur scout, you know nothing of the Count de Lune; he has said No."

"Very good, m'sieur. The fault be on your own head; we have our lives to think of." Then in a voice he might have used in talking to a lady he turned to his companion. "Felix, did ye not swear to do my bidding with this fellow?"

The half-soldier nodded.

"Then cut the cord from that bed and hang him. Over the door is the most convenient place, but hang him at once, there is small time to spare."

I have known men to be threatened with death, and, though having an alternative to which they might turn, refuse to take advantage of it, preferring to suffer for the

The Strength of the Weak

cause to which they had pledged themselves rather than to deny it, even at the price of life and freedom. But never have I known a villain to die through stubbornness. With the stoicism of a saint he may face the inevitable, but never will he fail to take the chance for life, no matter on what terms it is offered. It was thus with the Frenchman. With a nerve wonderful for its steadiness he sat with his arms folded, his bearded face as black as a thunder head, until the bed was stripped of its cord and Felix had made a running noose in the end, then he glanced out of the window, as if to calculate his time, and about the room in search of some chance weapon. I believe he would have fought the three of us had he been but partly armed. His eye finally fastened upon Spaulding, who stood, pistol in hand, watching his partner as he worked, then roved to his former valet, who was throwing the bight of the line over the heavy door. Finally, he spoke.

“I will sign the pass, m’sieur.”

For a moment my hatred of the man vanished in the sudden contempt I felt for him. One may have certain respect for a monster if he be consistent, but monsters should not flinch at receipt of that which they mete to others. The entire bearing of the Frenchman might have been sheer impudence on his part, a testing of nerve against nerve. He had tried it with me, and it is possible that he was experimenting with the voyageur, whom he doubtless hoped and expected would have fallen into a panic at sight of the approaching bateau.

But his reckoning, if such it was, fell far from the mark. Felix ceased his preparations, but the voice of the voyageur was absolutely without emotion as he said:

“M’sieur has had his opportunity. Felix, there is no occasion for delay. This devil must be with his fellows in less than ten minutes.”

Then indeed there came a change. The face of De

The Devil Cares for His Own

Mantel altered as though a mask had fallen from it. He became the colour of ashes, and then red again as the blood surged to and from his heart. His bravado disappeared, but not so his violence. In a fury he broke out:

“Will you kill a man who does your bidding, and in cold blood? There is no war to justify you. I tell you I will sign. M’sieur, have you no heart? Felix, thou art not so lost as to hang me, the man who was once thy master?”

“Ye never was master o’ mine,” said Felix, in English. Then he continued in French, as he pointed his long, lean hand at me: “How much hot blood was there in the starvation of yonder boy and in the word you gave me about him? How much of war to make it necessary? You ask me, will I hang you? Aye, that I will, and cut you in small morsels at the bidding of Leonard Spaulding. I was no servant of yours, for look you, m’sieur, I wormed into your fair opinion that I might make you a servant of mine, and did it at the order of Leonard Spaulding, to whom I owe my life. Whine not to me. Did you even whimper when you told me to see that yonder gentleman got no food? Come, m’sieur. I have my orders. Are you ready?”

As though hell’s door was ajar for him, and through it he had caught a glimpse of coming tortures—of what death really meant for him—De Mantel stared hard at the speaker. Then he turned on Spaulding with an eloquence of pleading in his look and outstretched hands. There were no words. All his bravado, all his insolence were gone. The mental agony of the man was so marked that, notwithstanding the miserable figure he cut, I could not help pitying him; and so miserable did he appear, that verily I think at that moment I should have spoken a word for him had not Spaulding interposed.

The Strength of the Weak

“M’sieur, I have never yet taken the life of a man of my own colour, nor have I shed the blood of a red-skin, even, save in self-defence. That you are a scoundrel, I make no doubt, since I have seen the same written by the father of the lad yonder. Yet am I loath to hang ye, as yerself may bear witness, and will offer ye one more chance, though to do it goes against my better sense. Will ye get rid of yonder boat-load so that we be not molested? Will ye and all yer men depart an’ leave the young lord in peace with his own? If ye will do these things, well—though, mind ye, I am not speaking o’ what the young man may do to ye. I make no promises save for myself. An’ ye do these things ye may live to be hanged by others. What say ye?”

De Mantel looked keenly at the speaker for a few moments without answering or moving, while the red slowly came back to his white countenance, then he turned abruptly, and walking to the window looked out at the oncoming boat.

He was in such a position that I alone could see his features, which he was now vainly trying to control. The old set came back to his jaw, the muscles on his temples worked fiercely, and his eyes half closed. Poor fool that I was to think as I did, that his emotion sprang from relief at the thought of a new lease of life. My instinct was of more value than my reason in those days, and for all that I was glad the man was not to be hanged in my own house, I felt that in promising him his liberty the voyageur had made a mistake. Was this monster to go unpunished, and was I to tamely bid him god-speed? As I stood looking at the fellow my gorge swelled. While he was begging for his life my pity had risen to the surface, and that, too, in behalf of a man whom less than an hour before I was ready to kill by stealth. Now, with the fear of immediate death re-

The Devil Cares for His Own

moved, his old repulsive expression came back, and back to me came my hatred for him. I could not condone his crime. There would be no use of appealing to the law in the case of the Count de Lune, backed by Joseph Cadet, who was upheld by his principal, Bigot, who in turn had the support of a corrupt government. It would be both a waste of time and opportunity, and at this juncture of my thoughts, clearly enough I recalled the last instructions of old Peyrotte. I must be a law unto myself, and of myself do justice on this mountain of iniquity. I must kill him in a fair fight, and to do so I must needs offer him a sword.

Yet I was not destined to have my way with him just at this time, however, and more's the pity. De Mantel stood by the window but for a moment, even for a time shorter than it has taken to write the above, and then he gave an exhibition of the versatility of his villainy. With a smile which transformed his face, he turned again to Spaulding, and approaching him with his right hand held out, he said:

"M'sieur, you are a generous man—more than merely a just man—and you have worked upon me in a manner none other could have done. I thank you for my life, and upon my honour as a French gentleman and an officer of his Majesty's, I promise to perform all you desire. Nay, m'sieur, you have undoubtedly been aggrieved. M'sieur le seigneur," indicating me by a wave of his hand, "has undoubtedly been aggrieved; he has cause for feeling hard towards me; he has been wronged, yet much has been done through mistake. I will make amends. I subscribe to all you demand. You are just. Felix has shown *finesse*. Would I have done the same? Indeed, yes—for a lady—and more. Felix has my full forgiveness. Ah, m'sieur, allow me to dress! Did you say there were prisoners? Wonderful! You would not trust a fallen foe with arms? No—not even

The Strength of the Weak

a sword? I would give orders to them, but an officer of France has his side-arms while in uniform, but if you say——”

I interrupted him here. The mingled feelings of disgust, hatred, and distrust that were within me, and which grew as I listened to this mass of thinly covered hypocrisy, were more than I could endure.

“M’sieur Dessonier, De Mantel, or De Lune, whichever you may be,” I broke in (for that he was playing at some game was plain enough to me), “you need not dress at present. Felix will unearth your sword, and I will grant you the favour you wished when I covered the retreat of Mademoiselle Jessie. It suits me to finish the work my old master left undone. If you kill me, m’sieur, then the estate is undoubtedly yours, subject to the dower right of my mother; but beyond the fact that you have well-nigh made me an orphan, your villainy makes you a constant menace to me as well as to all here; therefore, we will settle our differences, for I have no faith in your protestations. May the spirit of my father forgive me for deliberately crossing swords with his assassin.”

De Mantel gave me a look full of malignancy, though his face altered but little. If anything, his smile was more pronounced and his manner more unctuous as he bowed low and said:

“M’sieur le seigneur has, of course, the right to claim satisfaction at my hands, but if—but if the m’sieur desires the coming boat to withdraw he had much better postpone this matter until I have given the necessary order. I wish to assure all that I act in excellent faith, and I have sworn.” Then, with a most comprehensive waving of his spread palms and a shrug of his shoulders, he continued: “It is probable that not one here has trust in me. Gentlemen, gentlemen, let me prove myself.”

The Devil Cares for His Own

"Aye, prove yourself," returned Spaulding, "an' do it ere ye fight the youngster. I like not yer words or ways. Dress an' get down, an' ye will go without arms, officer though ye be. Do ye take us for zanies?"

"And send Felix with me," added the Frenchman. "Order him to kill me if I fail in the least you desire. Can I say more? I will soon be at the disposal of m'sieur le seigneur, and [with another deep bow] I assure him I will be lenient."

Now, that there was something wrong in the wind I felt certain, yet I could not fathom any chance for trickery on his part. I did not like the fact of his giving me my title at this late hour; but, whatever his game might be, I felt safer when Spaulding took the words from the Frenchman's mouth.

"Aye, Felix, 'tis not beyond Satan to preach a moral sermon for his own ends. Ye will go with our friend, an' if he acts or utters treason to us to the length of a syllable or the breadth of a hair, run him through or shoot him, as takes yer fancy. I think ye will walk straight with this, m'sieur."

"Ah, you are right!" returned De Mantel, with evident forced frankness. "M'sieur has the keenness of the fox. I honour him for it, and as a token of my good faith I beg of him to receive my hand."

"Nay, then," was the answer, "I care not to cross palms with ye. 'Tis from no love for ye that I grant ye this delay. Give me no soft tarms or promises, but act. Dress an' get ye gone, for I tell ye if those in the boat come hither yer life pays for it. Ye have the power to bid them off—do it, then, an' haste ye."

"But the pass!" I exclaimed.

"Aye, the pass," returned Spaulding. "Ye might find a pen somewhere—there's none here."

CHAPTER XV

THE TURN OF THE TABLES

THIS appeared a matter of importance to me, and I left the room in search of a pen, but it was some time before I could find even a quill. The upturned condition of my own and my mother's rooms made search there useless, but at length I came across a bundle in Peyrotte's desk. The old man's apartment had evidently been completely rifled of everything of value in the shape of accounts and papers, for all was in confusion, and a litter of torn books and destroyed documents covered the floor. I approached and entered the old soldier's room with dread—the dread of associations—and I was shocked to find it in its condition. With the rest, the bed had been unsmoothed, even the pillow retaining the impress of my old friend's head, and on the white counterpane was a broad and dark stain that caused me to recoil. The place was like a tomb.

Hastening back to the guest-chamber I found Spaulding standing at a window with his sister by his side. The others had gone. As I looked out I saw De Mantel clad in a uniform of a different make from the one in which he fought Peyrotte, and I thought it but natural that he shrank from displaying the old one with its suggestive stains and the more than suggestive slit in the cloth. He was walking over the sward, and two steps in his rear went Felix, armed with a musket. I remember how sharply the sun shot off the polished bayonet, how deeply blue was the sky, and how richly

The Turn of the Tables

green the woods. The boat with its soldiers was still some distance from shore.

As I entered the room the girl looked up and greeted me with a smile and a nod. I thought she would have spoken to me, but the voyageur broke in as I tossed the quills on to the desk.

"My lad, ye will never be safe in either life or property while yonder man lives," he said, with a gesture towards the lawn. "'Tis as plain as a stripped pine. Ye must needs kill the fellow. Ye behaved like a fair-minded Christian when ye gave him a chance, but I would have naught happen to ye. We will have him sign the pass when he comes back. 'Twas a stroke o' luck that I thought o' usin' him this way an' makin' him clear our path."

I had no chance to answer him, for as I was about to open my lips he continued fiercely: "By the piper, by all that's holy, yonder comes the Abnakis! Was my rifle at hand I would put him out o' further temptation. Eel is his name, but snake his nature. Ah, ha, ye red thief!" he exclaimed, shaking his fist towards the woods. "Ye are too late; the trap has been sprung."

I looked in the direction of the point indicated and marked an Indian lope across the open space and move towards the two who were walking below. He was apparently entirely unarmed. I never saw a human being move so like a snake. He neither walked nor ran, but covered the ground with a sinuous motion that made the manner of his progress uncertain to the eye, and it is this character in the snake that helps to make him hideous to mankind.

So did this red-skin affect me as he approached De Mantel with a subservience unusual to the Algonquin of those days, though they have since become degenerate. The trio halted an instant, and I saw De Mantel wave the savage to one side and move on, but instead

The Strength of the Weak

of obeying the gesture, the Indian hung to the skirts of the party, and continued with them towards the water's edge.

I am sure that intuition is, after a fashion, a sense, and one that is not sufficiently taken into account. That there was something working against us I felt positive. I had a vague sense of impending evil, although the conditions about us seemed to assure us of safety. And the menace of an unseen threat seemed to have smitten the girl also, for she suddenly touched the voyageur on the arm, and said:

"Brother Leonard, where is your rifle?"

"Faith," said Spaulding, "'tis mightily unlike me, but I laid it across the packs in the hall, and had fairly forgotten it. Ye may fetch it for me, lass, if ye will. I may pot the red-skin."

The girl was off like a deer just as I marked the boat reach the landing. I turned and looked after her, for her grace of movement was unusual, her beauty striking, and, moreover, I was a young man, and had small chances to see a woman, save the heavy and squarely built peasant or the slaving squaw. Certainly the beauties of Quebec were but lay figures when compared with this maiden. My eyes were still upon the vacant doorway through which she had vanished, when from the voyageur I heard an exclamation that caused me to return my attention to without.

The officer of the newly arrived party had stepped ashore and was in close communication with De Mantel. Felix stood within two paces of them, his musket in his hand ready for action, while on the turf, and with the characteristic squat of the Indian, sat the red-skin, he being, perhaps, twenty feet away. The soldiers were getting from the boat.

"What ails Felix?" demanded the voyageur, under his breath, as he observed the preparations being made

The Turn of the Tables

by the party to land ; but he had barely spoken the words when I saw De Mantel call Felix's attention and then point to the Indian, who was sitting perfectly quiescent. As the half-soldier turned his head to look towards the point indicated, De Mantel's hand went to the sword-hilt of the officer just abreast of him. I saw the flash of the steel as it leaped from the scabbard, and ere Felix could turn I saw De Mantel pass the blade through the body of his former valet. There was not a sound following the movement. Felix must have been killed instantly, for he fell like a log and lay without moving.

Probably no one was more surprised at this sudden attack than was the newly arrived officer, for, instead of making a movement, he stood as though planted, while De Mantel, now all animation, grasped the musket of the fallen man and pointed towards the house.

It was all done in a moment, and the entire scheme, which we had so willingly though unconsciously aided, was as clear as crystal. De Mantel had revenged himself on his valet, he had obtained his liberty, he had reinforcements, and the house was open below. For all his villainy, I could not be scant in my respect for his quick wit under the circumstances surrounding him, for the possibility of reprisal, and the arranging of the details of the plan by which he turned the tables on us must have passed through his head in the brief moment when he stood by the window after begging for his life.

Just then I had no realizing sense of what the loss of Felix meant to us. I simply felt the sentimental side—shock at the death of one who had risked much for me ; but it was followed by an overwhelming recognition of the consequences. The man beside me did not lose his head. As Felix fell he uttered an "Almighty God!" and when, an instant later, he fathomed the Frenchman's design of taking the house by storm, he threw open the window, and drawing his pistol, placed it

The Strength of the Weak

carefully on the sill, sighted, and fired. The fruit of this shot was that the soldier nearest De Mantel dropped his musket, grasped his right arm, which was probably shattered, and sat himself down on the grass; while the Indian, who during the tragedy had remained squatted and apparently unmoved, leaped to his feet at the report of the fire-arm, and, with wonderful smoothness and rapidity, sped across the green and towards the forest.

As Spaulding threw down his empty pistol he shouted: "'Tis an even chance who gets to the door first, an' Jessie is below!" He was out of the room ere completing the sentence, and I was at his heels.

The front door was now the goal of all parties. While, foot for foot, we were probably nearer the entrance than those outside, they had the advantage of having a straight line in which to run, while our course, owing to the turns of halls and stairway, albeit they were sufficiently broad, was comparatively devious. I know nothing of the manner in which I got over the ground, only I recollect having outstripped Spaulding (being lighter of heels and younger) by the time we reached the floor below. The main hall of the manor-house was eighty feet long from end to end, and perhaps twenty feet wide—a noble passage—and the staircase strikes it somewhat in the rear of the centre. Therefore, the front door, though in plain view, was still distant when we reached the bottom step, and through the wide portal I could see two soldiers within five paces of the great stone slab that lay before it. De Mantel and the others were somewhat in the rear, running with might and main. Within the hall I marked Jessie, apparently on her knees, as though hiding behind the packs of provisions and arms, which were about ready for removal. I could only give her a passing glance, and failed to see all she had done.

Even then I knew how hopeless the race was to us,

The Turn of the Tables

for beyond the fact that the soldiers were nearer than we, they were armed, while Spaulding was defenceless, save for a possible knife, and I was fortified by my rapier alone, which at that moment was clattering behind me and impeding my speed.

But in spite of the gloomy outlook we became masters of the situation, and that, too, in a way entirely unexpected. Jessie had seen the tragedy through the open door just as she walked down the hall towards the packs that were piled near the entrance. For an instant the girl had been paralyzed by the sight, but the shot from above had awakened her, and the advance of the party without brought to her a realizing sense of what was impending. There was but little time for her to either think or act, but she did both. Her brother's rifle was under her hand, and having faith in its being loaded, she took it from where it lay, and resting it across the breastwork made by the packs, sighted carefully at the foremost man and fired just as we reached the floor. I saw the fellow throw up his hands and stagger across the course of his companion, who collided with him, and both went to the ground, the accident compelling those behind to deviate in their course. This momentary delay gave us the race. With unabated speed I tore along the hall, gaining the entrance just in time to slam the great door fairly in the face of the officer, who was fumbling at his holster as he ran. Before the key turned in the lock Spaulding had swung the heavy bar and we were safe, safe for the moment at least.

CHAPTER XVI

JESSIE SPAULDING

I WAS not unnerved, but was undone from weakness and loss of breath, and ere I could reach the side window (a mere loophole commanding the entrance) I was glad enough to drop pretence and sit on the floor, for the hall and all in it suddenly took to swinging, the windows in the distance being all that was discernible through a rapidly gathering blackness. I had never felt like this; suddenly dropping from strength and light to darkness and the weakness of impending death, nor did I know its cause until from a seemingly immeasurable distance I heard the voice of Spaulding.

"The lad has been sorely tried an' is faint. Give him a drop o' this, lass; I must look out." Then there was momentary oblivion, followed by a smell of liquor, and I came back to light as suddenly as I had left it to find my head resting on the shoulder of the girl, who was upon her knees beside me, and to my lips she was holding a flask. She greeted me with a smile as I opened my eyes, apparently not a bit disturbed by that which had happened or by the danger we were in. With a feeling of shame at my weakness I pulled myself up and got to my feet.

"Mademoiselle Spaulding," I began, "I have to thank you for your kindness as well as for your timely——"

"Nay, then, sir," she interrupted, "there is no time for compliments or formality between us. My brother

Jessie Spaulding

needs assistance. Here are arms to be loaded. You are yet weak. Shall I load for you?"

She spoke in English with the slightest of French accents, and walked towards the packs, I following.

"Mademoiselle Spaulding," I began.

"I hardly know the name," she broke in, as she dropped a bullet into her small palm and poured over it enough powder to cover the lead, thus measuring the charge. "I have so long been known as Jessie only that my own name sounds unnatural, and—and is certainly unnecessary between us."

"Very well, Miss Jessie," I returned, as I picked up my own rifle and began loading it. "I must thank you for your timely shot as well as for your attention to me. You doubtless recognise the straits we are now in."

"Yes, that is, the straits we are liable to be in," she answered brightly. "I do not think those outside can get at us now unless they obtain help. It is a strange situation, but I have faith in my brother. When my brother says there is no hope then I may become terrorized, not before, m'sieur le seigneur."

She smiled as she spoke, but it was not the smile of flippancy. It was evident that she was not prone to cross bridges of trouble until she arrived at them, and her present safety—the safety of the moment—was all she looked at. There was a cheerful sprightliness about the way she whipped the rod into the rifle-barrel and drove home the charge, that showed her perfect familiarity with fire-arms. The sleeve of her tuniclike garment fell back almost to her elbow, displaying a forearm round, smooth, and in strong contrast to her brown and dimpled hands, inasmuch as the flesh was as white as milk.

"This does not surprise me," she continued. "I knew I must expect violence at any time, and indeed, m'sieur le seigneur, my life has been one surrounded

The Strength of the Weak

by some violence and a great deal of alarm since—since——” She hesitated a moment, as though loath to finish, but with charming archness she continued: “Since, when as a child, m’sieur, I clung to you when I was about to be carried away. You are not surprised, m’sieur? Do you indeed remember the little girl you defended five years ago? I knew you the moment I saw you. I have you to thank—and I thank you now.”

She threw her rifle into the hollow of her left arm in true woodsman fashion, and held out her right hand, a hand shapely and dimpled, albeit it was brown and slightly calloused in the palm, which, after all, was soft enough.

I had done very little towards loading my own rifle, for I had used my eyes less on my own business—necessary as it was—than on the girl, who acted and spoke so coolly in the face of the peril about us. Her eyes, in which I clearly saw her brother’s, had both puzzled and fascinated me; puzzled me to determine where I had seen them (even as her brother’s had bothered my memory), and fascinated me by the beauty of their liquid brown and their depth of the wonderful something more powerful than mere beauty, to describe which is well-nigh impossible. Appeal, trust, self-reliance, sweetness, love as deep as the sea, all the attributes of the perfect woman shone from this girl, whose memory, to me, is now a sacred thing—a blessing, and to see whose beautiful face I have but to muse on the past.

But with her reference to my having given her comfort five years before, the matter cleared in an instant. Here was, indeed, the miserable little maiden for whom I had assaulted an Indian, and whose distress had moved me so strongly. How had the wheel of fortune turned, that, in a measure, she whom I had comforted had become my comforter, and by the quality of whose wit

Jessie Spaulding

and nerve I had been protected against an enemy who was capable of out-deviling the devil himself!

I was not taken by surprise at the discovery, for, indeed, I was upon the edge of making it myself, else why should my brains have been wool-gathering at the sight of the girl, who, for dignity and classic outline, had many superiors. It was an embarrassing moment for me, but it was a moment from which I have gathered the fact that there are times in one's life when personal danger is not the factor most potent to stir human emotions. For, here was I, a young man of natural timidity, in an unusual, perilous, and difficult position; and at a time when I should have been active in my own behalf, here I was totally forgetful of everything save the girl before me, and, probably, like a yokel, showing open-mouthed admiration for her. I do not feel proud of myself as I look back upon that moment, for, to be true, I lost sight of aught else save that this girl had once clung to me and sobbed at parting—and I wished she would do it again.

But if it was not love that held me, what, then, could be called the mighty rush of feeling—the self-abnegation—the uplifting and the despair that have followed? But I will not deny that the seed was there sown. I know I did not appear very heroic as I mumbled out something anent the slightness of my service as compared to hers, and held her small hand, ah! I remember it, somewhat longer than was necessary.

CHAPTER XVII

WOODCRAFT

BUT my mental aberration did not endure for long, because I was soon brought to a sense of the present by Spaulding, who came down-stairs and joined us. He looked dejected.

"Are ye right again, lad?" he asked. "I fear we can put no active work upon ye until ye be fed up. Poor Felix—poor Felix! This is an awful blow. I could ill spare him either as a friend or a helper. We be crippled indeed."

"Where are they?" I asked.

"Taken to the woods like prudent men—though every eye is upon the house, doubtless. 'Tis a strange stroke. We are caught and yet we have those caught." And he pointed towards the cellar. "Let us hold a council while we have the time. They be as afraid of us as we of them, but some plan must be hatched that we may draw out o' this hole. Curse my stupidity! Is there a point into which they can break, lad? Ye know the house."

"It was built to withstand a sudden attack by Indians," I answered, "and without cannon I think they cannot force us."

"Aye," he returned, "but we have foes within as well as without. 'Tis plain we must get hence—but how?"

"Could they not fire the house?" asked the girl.

"They could in the darkness o' night, but they will not," answered the voyageur.

Woodcraft

“And why not?”

“Because the Frenchman would not destroy that which he claims as his own, an’ because o’ the prisoners below.”

“There is still another reason,” I ventured, looking at the girl as she stood erect by her brother’s side.

“Aye, because o’ Jessie,” he returned, with a black scowl, while at my nod the blood rushed to his sister’s face. “Damn him!” he continued; “if he ever lays hands upon the lass again it will be his last act in this world, else I am out of it. We need fear no fire yet awhile. An’ now for a plan. Have ye one?”

I shook my head, for, indeed, I saw no way out of our dilemma. The house was practically surrounded, and the men below might attempt to break out at any moment. If I had been called upon to express an opinion as to how all this was to end it would have been to the effect that we would stand a siege, defending ourselves until ammunition and provisions were exhausted or numbers overcame us, and then either surrender or die fighting. All led to the same ending; death to Spaulding and me, and worse than death to the girl. And this in a civilized country at a period when open hostilities had not commenced between France and England.

Spaulding walked to the loophole by the door, looked out and returned.

“Not a soul in sight,” he said, as he came up. “But the case of the soul of poor Felix still lies yonder in the hot sun. He sped at once, I hope, and now I say that his poor body must not be deserted. So be it I get from here Felix goes with me to decent burial or I stay here with him.” And the voyageur brought his palm down upon his buck-skinned thigh with a report that echoed through the silent hall like a pistol-shot.

The girl looked up.

The Strength of the Weak

“ Might we not make a diversion—some pretence—at one end of the house when it becomes quite dark, and escape from the other end? ” she asked, speaking to her brother.

“ Yer plan flavours o’ sense, lass, but ye do not carry it far enough. Who is to bell the cat outside that we may know he has taken the bait? ” he asked, a somewhat grim smile lighting his sober face.

“ I know nothing of the cat, ” she returned. “ I thought to give an idea—not carry one to the finish. ”

“ Aye, aye, an’ so ye have, Jessie, ” said Spaulding, laying his great hand on her brown head and smoothing her round cheek in a manner that at any other time would have made me envious.

“ Were it not for the prisoners below, ” I ventured, “ we might have a fair chance by digging out by night. De Mantel will have an eye to both doors and windows; he will not think of a hole in the ground. But the prisoners are below. ”

“ Those below are a small matter, since, if we wished, we might get them out one by one an’ make way wi’ them. But I can better yer diggin’ plan, lad. The prisoners be there, an’ a good thing it is so, since ’tis those same prisoners I look to to save us—so be it saved we are. ”

“ *They* save us! ” I exclaimed.

“ That same, unless I am blind, ” he said, speaking with increasing animation. “ List now. Can ye not guess that ’twill not be long ere those below discover two things: first, that there is no guard over them, and second, that they have friends without? Now comes your diversion, Jessie. ’Twill not be long, I take it, before they move a window-bar by the help of that same log which has helped them already, an’ if they escape being shot by their friends, who may take them for us, ’tis likely that the whole force will assault the house

Woodcraft

from under cover by coming in through the breach and breaking down the hall-door. By that time I hope we can find our way to the lake ; if not, God help us."

"It will work," I said, relieved at seeing half a chance.

"'Tis like to work but for one reason," he replied with a frown.

"And that?"

"The Abnakis. Ye can bedevil a Frenchman, but the Eel is another matter. I know that red-skin's nater. The woods o' Maine and all Canada holds not his better as a savage. I know not whether he tracks by his nose, like a hound, or by his eye alone, but I ne'er knew his equal. He is an imp from hell. Did ye not mark his work on me? Felix sent him with a message to me anent this place, where we were to rescue Jessie, and the devil thought to brain me an' warn the Frenchman an' thereby get great reward. An' now he knows that the world is too small for us both. I tell ye he is to be feared. But enough o' this. If ye see no flaw in my plan I will make a shift to hurry matters. Jessie, watch through yonder loophole. Chatsworth, come wi' me an' be handy to show, an' in case o' mischance."

He turned abruptly and walked towards the kitchen-door, whither, like one sworn to obey, I followed.

With the same precaution that I had used before entering De Mantel's room, Spaulding placed his ear to the door for a moment, then, turning the key, walked in. The sun, now well down the western sky, lighted the room with a broad band of radiance cut sharply by the window-bars, and emphasized the disorder that had reigned since our raid upon the pantry, while the nameless and depressing air of destruction and desertion was as marked here as it was throughout the house.

Stepping boldly to the cellar way the voyageur threw open the door. The log, which had remained in

The Strength of the Weak

the rent it had made, dislodged by the movement, fell with thunderous bumps down the stair, but no sooner had it reached the bottom than there came a scrambling of feet, and through the gloom appeared the somewhat haggard face of the French officer. He blinked blindly as he struck the strong light, and ere he could speak a word, Spaulding had him by the shoulder.

"Your sword, m'sieur."

The officer at once unbuckled his belt, and tendered scabbard and all, which Spaulding motioned me to take. As I advanced the officer looked at me, and the dazzle went from his eyes. With a muttered *sacré* he turned to my companion.

"M'sieur, there has been trickery."

"Is it trickery that the seigneur has returned to claim his own?" asked Spaulding. "You may make it a personal matter with him when I choose to pass you. I tell you, m'sieur, you had better confess your sins, for upon you, as upon the late count, he will have no mercy."

I stiffened my features into uncompromising hardness.

"The *late* count!" gasped the Frenchman. "Has he crossed swords with——"

"Nay, no swords. Have you heard nothing within the house?"

"We thought we heard shots, m'sieur."

"Well—shots are necessary at times—and m'sieur will be careful not to push inquiries. However, we do not mean to starve him to death. You have the liberty of the kitchen—you and your men. There is food enough. But make no attempt upon the hall-door. Doubtless you comprehend."

The fellow bowed without answering, and his crest-fallen look was sufficient evidence of his mental condition. I bowed slightly, but without relaxing my fea-

Woodcraft

tures, and in a minute more Spaulding and I were in the hall, and the kitchen-door was again locked.

"An he sees not his chance now," said the voyageur, as he turned the key, "he is indeed a Gaul, an' our hopes will have a setback. Let us take observation from above. We will not disturb those in the kitchen when they begin work on the bars, but those without must not be allowed to approach until darkness sets in. I fear ye have a soft heart, my son, but see to it that ye shoot without conscience, and if ye will pot either the count or the Abnakis, ye will have my everlasting gratitude. Take ye the rear of the house, Jessie has the front, and I will look to the sides. Keep well covered, lad, an' God be wi' ye."

With this he turned and left me, and I made my way to the top of the house. As I went thither I stopped in the guest-chamber to recover and load the pistol that Spaulding had fired and thrown down. It lay near the desk, and as I bent for it my eye caught the unsigned pass which had been left where De Mantel had pushed it. In an inspiration I caught up a quill, hastily fashioned a nib, and dashed off the signature, "Cap't, the Count de Lune," in an affected, offhand manner, without knowing how closely I had struck the style of writing or the usual title of the scoundrel in question. This I pocketed and went my way.

My approach to the window from which I was to watch, and which opened north, was cautious enough, for I had small doubts that De Mantel had so disposed of his small force that each point of the mansion was under observation, and that my open appearance would be greeted by a bullet. Therefore, like a wise youth, I approached the end of the corridor on all-fours and did no more than bring my eyes above the sill of the casement, which had been thrown wide. The building nearest me was the cow-house in which I

The Strength of the Weak

had taken shelter that morning, and beyond it stood the stables from which the two horses I owned had probably long since gone. For this I cared nothing, as they could not have been used in our flight. Beyond and to one side of the stables was the orchard and granary, while surrounding all lay the primeval forest, broken here and there by a small clearing, indicating the habitation and infield of a tenant. Yet beyond, the billowy green was cleft by a line that marked the high road half a mile away, while far to the north the highlands lifted the horizon and finished the beauty of the expansive view. Not a soul was within my sight; not a sign of life save the green of the verdure, and the land lay hot and mute beneath the westering sun.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BITER BITTEN

AND yet, to my imagination, nothing could have been more portentous than the silent green woods, now motionless in the dead air, the deserted appearance of the outbuildings and the lonesome winding of the dusty road that led from the house northward. Any shadow might hold an enemy. The sashless windows of the cow-house, blank as dead eyes, appeared to be a vantage point for an unseen fire-arm, which might blaze out upon me at any instant. The long shadows which the fruit-trees now flung across the grass and the caverns of darkness in the near-by forest were beautiful with the beauty of a serpent, fascinating but deadly. The very peace—the very repose resting on Nature—was but the holding of the breath, the prelude to tragedy.

I was unused to this mental exaltation, and yet, through the tingling of my nerves, boy as I was in reality, I recognised the joy of the game I was playing. I am wiser now, and my appetite, jaded by excitement, suffers me to see the barbarous instinct that still clings to us; to see that much of so-called patriotism is of a sort that can only live backed by the rifle and the hope of using it, and that there is nothing in God's world so absorbing as the man hunt. Acting in self-defence I had no qualms of conscience, enjoying the suppressed excitement to the full, and my rifle was ready to be thrown forward on the instant.

But nothing appeared, neither did any startling

The Strength of the Weak

sound break the brooding silence of that late afternoon. Anon I heard the footfalls of the voyageur as he trod the floor below, passing from one side of the house to the other in ceaseless observation, and finally he paid me a visit, commended my ceaseless vigilance, and reported that his sister was still at her post, but had marked nothing. He told me the Frenchmen below were either too stupid or too heart-broken and cowardly to take advantage of their opportunity, for as yet they had made no attempt upon the bars of the window nor did they appear to be aware of the proximity of their friends. I suggested the possibility of the enemy seeing the hopelessness of an attempt to dislodge us, and that perhaps they had retired, but the woodsman laughed at the idea.

“Faith, lad, ye have hunted; would ye give up yer game when ye had it treed or holed? Nay, ye would not. An’ they have us holed, an’ they know it. Think not that the woods yonder be blind.”

He went away and did not return again until early dusk. He was evidently worried, for his brows were puckered and he spoke bitterly.

“The fools below have not budged,” he said. “That means a sight o’ risk to us, for we must make an attempt to break from here this night. By to-morrow they will have more men, an’ then the dance will be up; they will have us like rats in a trap. Have ye seen aught?”

“Not a thing,” I answered.

“Then ’tis but chance,” he said, “for look yonder at what now comes.”

My gaze followed his pointed finger. Down the narrow road that led from the forest strode a soldier, and even through the gathering gloom I recognised him as the man who had been sent for the bateau—the fellow who had discovered the string on the vine—the man whom I had accused of robbing me. In his hand he

The Biter Bitten

bore a ramrod to which was tied a white cloth, and this he held aloft and waved with much vigour. My first instinct was to cock my fire-arm, but the voyageur laid a detaining hand on the gun-barrel and said :

“Wait a bit, my son. It may be a true flag or it may be but a ruse to bring us forth. Keep yourself low.”

With eyes just above the sill of the window we watched the soldier approach. Unless he bore some concealed pistol or knife, he was unarmed, and both hands were held aloft, as though to assert his harmlessness. Without hesitation he walked towards the door, but when within ten paces of it, halted, and lifting up his voice, shouted in French :

“I would speak with the seigneur in behalf of the Count de Lune.”

“I would have more faith in ye if ye spoke in behalf o’ the devil,” muttered Spaulding ; “but we will just smell o’ the bait. Let us go below.”

Now that De Mantel had chosen to send a flag to us was no encouragement in my judgment. That the man was without principle either in peace or war was plain enough by this time, and I would have been stupid indeed and without hope of improvement had I been simple enough to be deceived by the message sent by the flag-bearer. The voyageur would hold no parley with the fellow unless he came into the house, having an idea, he told me, that perhaps we might use the messenger to our own advantage.

As the soldier entered and the door was closed and barred behind him he bowed low to me (as he had doubtless been told to do), and this alone, before he spoke, was enough to confirm any suspicion of trickery I might have had. But the message showed the vast impudence of its inventor. The soldier addressed himself to me.

The Strength of the Weak

"If the seigneur will vouchsafe to pack the luggage of the count and restore it to him with his arms, and if he will also liberate Captain Cassin and the men imprisoned within the house the count promises upon his honour as a French officer and a gentleman to withdraw to Quebec and trouble the seigneur no more. The count is sick, overwrought by events, and only desires peace."

That De Mantel was in a weakened condition I knew, and that he might be suffering from unusual exertion and a measure of chagrin at the partial failure of his plan, I was ready enough to believe. But that he was willing to depart on any condition (save that of triumph), leaving me to hound him, I did not for an instant believe. However, I did not thus express myself. Before I could make an answer to this astonishing proposition Spaulding spoke.

"Is your master an ass, then, to send such a message?"

"The count wishes peace," returned the man.

"The count, as you call him, will get no peace in this world," said the woodsman in French, "for he has fouled Leonard Spaulding and murdered his friend. I regret I cannot send him this message, yet he may guess it."

"You refuse terms, then?" asked the soldier, turning to me.

"Look to him," I said, pointing to Spaulding, whose temper was evidently not mollified by the insult offered by the man who had turned his back on him. The fellow swung around doggedly.

"Inasmuch as there is no reply and no messenger to send with it, had there been one, it is useless to talk of refusing terms," returned Spaulding, walking up to the man and thrusting his face close to that of his victim. "I know your master, and as for you and your lying

The Biter Bitten

message, we have them both. Have you a prayer at your tongue's end? If so, say it."

The fellow was bright enough to comprehend his situation, and in all probability he now felt that his life was in danger, for turning from the frowning face and flashing eye of the voyageur he again appealed to me.

"M'sieur le seigneur, you will not allow me to be held as a prisoner! I came under the white flag."

Whatever might be the rules of war respecting the dignity of a flag of truce I knew that treachery could not be met openly with success, nor did I dream for an instant of interfering with the plan, which, by his words, was doubtless being hatched by the voyageur. Therefore I answered:

"Did you not lay violent hands upon me, fellow, and was it by command of an officer? No. You were glad enough to obey a mere civilian—a butcher. Was it by orders that you knocked me in the head and well-nigh killed me, and do you now presume to plead to me? M'sieur Spaulding may work his will with you."

"M'sieur," he answered, "I acted on orders. In fact, m'sieur, I apologized for the blow from which you have recovered. M'sieur knows it. I beseech him to have compassion. I am to receive my discharge and return to France, m'sieur, in two months. I have there a wife. She looks for me. Surely m'sieur will not see me harmed."

"Discharged to return to France!" I exclaimed. "You are of the militia of the Province. Your case is plain. You are of your master—a bundle of lies! You have been a deserter."

I think it was at that moment that I allowed myself the weakness of superstition and believed in a lucky star. I had made no pretence save at a fierceness I was far from feeling, in order to bear out Spaulding, but events showed I had accidentally struck a current that ran full

The Strength of the Weak

in our favour. Before I could say more the fellow stared at me, uttered an exclamation, dropped on his knees, and clasped his hands. Consternation amounting to abject terror showed both in his voice and his actions.

“M’sieur, m’sieur, do not betray me. I will confess all! Have I not enlisted and served France? My lord, I was but just married when I was conscripted, and I deserted but for a little six months. Then, my lord—I mean m’sieur le seigneur—I came to New France. Some wives are troublesome, m’sieur, and I enlisted in the army of the Province. Betray me not, for the love of the Virgin, and I will tell thee all.”

I was quick enough to catch the situation, but had no need to question the fellow, for with the volubility of his nation and class he drove his information and supplication together into such a mass of words that it was hard to gather his real meaning. From it, however, I gleaned that De Mantel had sent the message as a ruse, which he hoped would put us off guard, and that one of the newly arrived men had been despatched overland for re-enforcements. The villain was indeed prostrated by exertion, but was in no serious state, and was now occupying a cottage belonging to a tenant. The Indian had not been seen since the fall of Felix, and here the prisoner expressed a jumble of wonder and sorrow at the death of his old comrade. We learned, too, that, as Spaulding had surmised, the house was being constantly watched from the cover of the surrounding forest.

As the story terminated, Spaulding looked at me and said in English, of which the soldier evidently had no knowledge:

“’Tis as I feared. They will soon have us out o’ here. Ye must pretend fierceness with the fellow an’ then lock him up with the others. If he shows them not the way out and the rest the way in, I lose my guess.

The Biter Bitten

They must be made to act ; an' 'tis a bare chance that if they gather on one side we may escape on the other."

It may appear strange to those unacquainted with the times of which I write that the soldier became so abject at my blundering on to the fact that he was a deserter. But by so doing he showed himself to be no fool, for he had quickly recognised that the consequences of desertion from the French army (even though he had enlisted as a volunteer) would be harder to bear (were the facts known) than treason to the personal interests of De Mantel.

And here the matter ended. The soldier was informed that as he had acted as the bearer of a message which he knew was not sent in good faith he would be held a prisoner as hostage for the good behaviour of his master. As for silence regarding his desertion, I would promise him nothing, and he was locked in the kitchen, possibly relieved that he had not been killed offhand for the part he had played with me.

"He will make a guide for those blockheads," said the voyageur, as he turned the key. "The Lord knows they need one."

CHAPTER XIX

IN THE DARK

THE very condition that made the house easily defended was one that, in turn, held us in check and would render our escape most difficult, and that, the cleared space which intervened on all sides between the mansion and the surrounding forest. As I returned to my post and the gloom of the night descended, my imagination peopled the border of the woodland with here and there a creeping figure, and I was only restrained from shooting by the fact that the light was too uncertain to make sure of the mark. As gloom merged into black darkness all watching without became useless and our ears were our sole guards.

It was when we had come together for a moment in the great hall for the purpose of snatching a bite of food that I heard for the first time the curdling war-whoop of an Indian. I had heard it before as an illustration and in the dance, but it had always lacked the terrific intensity of the single cry that seemed to split the throat producing it. Spaulding had just been explaining the necessity of abandoning a portion of the gathered stores both on account of the death of Felix (making us one less) and the manner of our attempt to escape, when the terrific whoop broke from the immediate vicinity of the front door and echoed through the silent hall with horrid effect. Had a cannon been exploded it would have caused me less consternation, for it could have been no more unexpected and would have lacked the quality of

In the Dark

that shrieking cry. Both Spaulding and I sprang to our feet, but at once the woodsman relaxed as he recognised the sound.

"'Tis the Abnakis," he said. "'Tis the savage's cry o' triumph. He has discovered something or done some deed. I make little doubt that the cry is over the scalp of poor Felix. The devil waited until dark ere attempting it. He is a wise one. Whence came his knife, I wonder, having lost all in the lake?"

"Have you planned in detail?" I asked.

"Small detail there will be," he answered. "Not much above opening the door as quietly as may be an' walkin' away. There is only the time to be set. Plant the lass over the kitchen window that she may listen—ye know the way above, my son—then come to me."

The stairway and upper hall with its distant windows, now but spots of the faintest radiance, made a guide absolutely necessary to one unused to the plan of the house. As we reached the upper landing I took the girl by the hand, and the frank and fearless way in which her smooth, warm fingers returned my clasp put into me a life that had not the least connection with my peculiar high-strung feeling occasioned by the surrounding conditions. The blackness of the hall was complete. Cautiously I led the girl to my mother's apartment, one window of which was not only near the kitchen, but by an angle in the room commanded a view of the window below. This, however, appeared to be of but little advantage, for the night was so dark that nothing smaller than the human form could have been discovered ten feet away, and that but in outline and by expectant eyes. I opened the casement noiselessly and got the girl seated comfortably before it. I was bending low to her ear, telling her I would relieve her watch as soon as possible, when I heard a noise that told me the prisoners were at last becoming active.

The Strength of the Weak

It was plain enough. They had waited until blank darkness had set in, and then done precisely as Spaulding had hoped, for it was evident that they were trying to widen a space between the window-bars by the aid of a lever, presumably a stick of fire-wood, of which the cellar contained a quantity. As the work progressed they became more and more unguarded, until finally we could hear the voice of the officer as he gave directions under his breath. I left the maiden and found Spaulding with his ear against the kitchen door, for even through the wood-work his keen sense of hearing had caught the sound from within.

"They be at it," he whispered. "Little they care now; they have fastened the door against us. This must bear fruit at once if at all. In the dark we might pass to the forest even in the face of a sentinel, though it would be something of a risk. Fetch Jessie an' let us make ready."

I went for the girl and found her sitting like a statue. The noise below had ceased, and the maiden informed me that she had heard those below drop from the window, though she could not see how many had escaped. The silence was now absolute, and we remained listening so long and without hearing a sound, I became convinced that instead of those without using the window as a point of entry, it had been used as a means of egress by those within, and our strategy had ended by increasing the number of the guard around us instead of drawing them to assault us at what appeared to be our only vulnerable spot. I listened with my soul in my ears. The clock struck ten and I was about giving up, when I heard a sound that held me: a step, a number of voices whispering, followed by a gentle grating and a muffled bump, as though something had been laid against the side of the house. I could not guess its import then, but I did a moment or two later. My eyes were fixed

In the Dark

upon the kitchen window vainly attempting to pierce through the darkness and discover the cause of the sounds when my vision was blocked by the sudden appearance of a man's head within two feet of my own. It came out of the blackness a blurred outline against the faint sky, without expression or feature, but a man, without doubt. For an instant surprise was the only emotion possessing me, but it was soon intermixed with fear, and despite the situation my first connected thought was how he could have got where he was. But while surprise, wonder, and fear were working together, clearly through it all came the recollection of the ladder, which had been lying on the grass, where it had been thrown on the day of Cadet's search of my room and person. It was evident that the enemy had determined to enter the house through an upper story instead of the kitchen.

However, there was no time to press inquiries. I acted entirely upon instinct, and though I was fully armed, had no thought of using aught but the weapons God had given me, and, without considering results, I dashed my fist with all my force against the silhouetted head. I struck the fellow fairly in the mouth, for his teeth scored my knuckles. Whatever he had a hold on gave way, or he lost his grip under the blow, for he disappeared with a sharp cry. There was a curse or two from his fellows, a scramble ending in a thud as the body struck the grass, then a scampering of feet, and presently all was again quiet.

Now this episode strangely enough, perhaps, gave me encouragement. For I reckoned the fate which directed me to that window in time to interfere with what would have been an entire and ruinous surprise to us, would favour us to the end. Having little fear of another immediate attempt on that point, and hearing nothing more, I went down-stairs and reported.

The Strength of the Weak

"We will bide here no longer," said the voyageur when I told him of my experience, "an' now ye must do my bidding, asking no questions. Ye are to let me from the front door an' fasten it behind me—only have it ready to open swiftly. Listen carefully, an' when ye hear from the landing a hoot given thrice, followed by a word in French, open out an' make yer way wi' Jessie to that pint on the shore where ye pulled me out o' the water. I think the blackness of the night will make the risk small. If ye hear a shot, let it not affright ye, but if ye hear nothing an' I do not come to ye by dawn, give me up an' do the best ye can wi' God's help. I have told the girl, an' she weeps as though I was already lost. Can I depend on ye?"

His voice might have been that of a spirit for all I could see of him, for the hall was so dark that though I held my hand within six inches of my nose I could not make out the faintest movement to my wriggling fingers. But his whispered words were enough without seeing his face, for in them was that tone of appeal I had noticed the day I pulled him from the lake, a something matching the softer side of the man, a side of which as yet I had seen little. He felt for my hand and gripped it with a strength that showed me the warmth of his nature and made me flinch.

In return I had but few words for him, only saying I would do his bidding, and do it gladly. The element of uncertainty kept my heart high and my senses taut enough, yet the only doubt I felt concerning the safety of the voyageur was in the brief interval of the stealthy unbarring of the door. He thrust his head through the opening, listened intently for a moment, then I felt him sink under my hand until he dropped flat on his stomach and squirmed away into the blackness of the night.

CHAPTER XX

THE FLIGHT

WHEN at last he was gone I realized how much I had depended upon the strength of his nature.

But the girl was the cause of my apparent steadiness. She had evidently ceased weeping, but she said not a word as we stood side by side in the blackness, and I could hear her breath come and go, once in a while broken by a fluttering sigh. She stood so close to me (as though bidding for comfort) that I could feel the warmth of her body and catch the subtle scent which enveloped her person. Even so will the rose silently betray its gracious presence. Gradually, like a child, she drew towards me, finally touching me, and then she placed her hand in mine with such innocence and lack of hesitation that she went straight to my heart, and I think I loved her from that moment. Be that as it may, but from that moment until this I have never thought of my own comfort, safety, hopes, or ambitions, as matters distant from her, and that, too, when I had no right to consider her as aught to me, only holding to myself the God-given and human right to love the lovable. And there we stood, hand in hand, with ears expectant and nerves stretched like fiddle-strings. There had a slight breeze arisen since sunset, and through the loophole against which our ears were trained I heard its whisper and felt its breath, chill with the dampness from the lake. The best part of an hour passed and my blood was cooling rapidly. I thought of the morrow

The Strength of the Weak

and the voyageur's last instructions to do my best, with God's help, if he failed in his purpose. I was even figuring on my future and the fate of the girl at my side, when from the hall the clock boomed out eleven. It seemed to shout the lateness of the hour, but the song of the bell had barely died when I heard the hoot of an owl. It was immediately followed by a cry from the lake and the words, uttered in French:

“ Help, my comrades! They are escaping! ” Then came a single shot from the same direction and a number of shouts from a point near the house. It was the signal, and with it came the knowledge that the guards were alert, and that we must depend upon the darkness for our safety. I know not what inspiration moved me, but I stooped for the bundles we were to carry and silently threw the front door wide open. But I did not go out that way. Drawing the girl after me I hurried along the hall to the rear door. This I unbarred and opened boldly, there being no time for delay, and as I did so I heard voices and footsteps entering the house at the opposite end. For one moment I hesitated on the threshold, but when I heard the striking of a flint and steel (though what the enemy expected to kindle was beyond my guess) I fled. I had done wisely in retreating to the rear, and with the girl grasping one hand and my rifle and bundle in the other I crept down the steps and plunged into the black obscurity before me.

The sky, which had been clear at sunset, was now overcast. I knew this because my eye sought for the north star, but not a twinkler was in sight. If the intense gloom was to hinder our progress, it would also be a factor to our safety, but we had not taken many steps ere we ran afoul of a crab-tree, one of the few fruit-trees near the rear of the mansion and to have found which, had I desired it, would have been most difficult. It served me a good turn, however, albeit it

The Flight

had caused me a smart blow, for it enabled me to determine the direction I had taken. I here made up my mind that the forest would be impenetrable in this gloom, and that my safest course would be to remain in the open, skirting the woodland at such a distance as would allow me to see its outline against the sky. We could seek its shelter, if necessary, though nothing but a hound, I thought, could track us before daylight.

Therefore, by a pressure of the hand, I urged the girl onward. She had given no sign of impatience or doubt, nor had her sweet lips troubled me with even a whispered question or a suggestion. Never for an instant had her grasp relaxed, neither did she hold back or give signs of trepidation as we heard the enemy enter the hall behind us. There was no rustle from her dress, and her small moccasined feet made no more noise than though she had been a fairy—and but little more of an impress, I dare swear.

It was easy going for us now. The sward was firm, level, and free from obstruction, and our danger lay not in being seen from either the house on one side or the forest on the other, but in some possible noise on our part or an accidental blundering into one of the guards. However, we ran the gantlet in safety, my greatest difficulty being in keeping my rapier from announcing our whereabouts, for it struck my rifle-barrel whenever I shifted it. When we arrived where the woods joined the water I placed the girl on the grass, and, leaving her, followed the shore to the spot the voyageur had indicated as the rendezvous. He was there—God bless him—sitting like a statue in the bateau, his figure dimly silhouetted against the ghostly water of the lake which reflected the sky, and then for the first time I felt the sweet sense of assured freedom.

I made myself known in a whisper, but he afterward told me he had guessed of my coming from the way I

The Strength of the Weak

had moved, for a soldier would have made much more noise, while an Indian would have made none at all. I explained that the woods had been too difficult to penetrate, and weighted as I had been it was small wonder I had announced my coming, for my course along the shore had been but a series of stumbles and bumps. I got into the boat and we paddled back until near the clearing, and I again took to the land to fetch the girl. As I approached the open I saw a light beam from a window in the now distant house, and was wondering if De Mantel had been notified of our escape, when my ears were assailed by a piercing shriek, which, though years had passed since I had heard its like, I plainly recognised. It broke from a point not two rods from where I stood and I knew it was the voice of the maiden. My blood turned to ice, then to fire, and I leaped forward, guided by the sound of a struggle and the now muffled cries of the girl. As I drew close to the scene (if the limit of vision can allow of its being so called) I made out a black mass moving towards the forest to the edge of which was not more than ten paces. Intuitively I knew the girl was being carried off, and, all unarmed as I then was, I jumped fairly upon the back of her captor, and together the man, the maiden, and myself came to the ground. My adversary immediately turned his attention to me, and in my desperation, my frenzied state of mind, and the nature of the stake in the conflict, I would have been no mean opponent to any one. By the silence of the man beneath me, his close dress, and the rankness of the odour emanating from him, I knew I had fallen afoul of an Indian, and knew, too, it could only be the Abnakis, for, according to the voyageur, no other living man could have followed us through the pitlike darkness.

I think my greatest dread was that the struggle would draw both Spaulding and the Frenchmen, and

The Flight

that upon this spot, so close to the border of safety, would be fought out (to our certain ruin) the final battle. But I was far too thoroughly occupied to look for the coming of any one. If I fought like a shrew, my adversary fought like an Indian—that is, he shook me off, only to be regrasped, and glided from under me with the subtle undulation, the slippery evasiveness to be found in his namesake the eel. A dozen times I had him by the throat, but it turned to steel and whipped out of my hand ere I could sink my fingers in the flesh. His wrists and arms drew from my grip (which was none of the weakest) as if they were slimed, and his lightly covered ribs sprung beneath me like hoops of hickory. His struggles, however, were more in defence than offence, and I might have known that the wily devil was not looking for freedom from my grasp as much as for the knife he had doubtless dropped and was seeking for. Together we rolled upon the ground, the advantage of the situation passing from one to the other again and again, but too rapidly for a permanent victory for either. For the most part we were both silent, save for the rustle of the struggle and the explosive discharge of breath. Once I cried for Spaulding, but the red-skin raised no shout and the girl had become dumb. Through the fight I had an intuitive consciousness that she lay on the ground not far from where the Indian and I were rolling, but in what straits I knew not. In my underfed condition it is yet a wonder to me how I held my own so long against the savage. The contest might have been measured by seconds for aught I know, surely by minutes; but it seemed like hours, and my breathing was becoming distressed, when, like a voice from heaven, I heard the cry:

“I am coming, lad,” and Spaulding broke from the woods at a little distance away. Then I gathered the last of my breath and shouted: “The red-skin—the Eel!”

The Strength of the Weak

And as I cried, with a powerful twist and a throw the Indian flung me from him with a force I was past resisting. Fairly across the body of the girl he threw me, and as I vainly tried to regain my lost position, I felt the sickening chill and shock of cold steel between my ribs, while the devil, who was now above me, raised his voice in a wild yell of victory, and, leaping across my body, vanished towards the house just as the voyageur came rushing up. It was doubtless the latter's timely arrival that saved my scalp.

I knew I had been cut, but I answered the call of the voyageur and got to my feet, feeling more distressed from loss of wind than loss of blood.

"Are ye hurt, my lad?" asked the voyageur.

"Stabbed," I gasped.

"God! God!" he ejaculated. "Where's Jessie? Can ye walk?"

"Aye, I think so," I said, "and the girl is here."

"Then get ye to the boat, if ye can. I will follow with her. The whole force will be upon us in a jiffy."

And, indeed, the latter seemed likely. From about the house there were shouts and cries of inquiry, though no one came very near and no shots were fired. As I walked slowly towards the boat, groping my way, my breath came back to me, and my strength increased instead of failing, though my knees were weak enough. The knowledge that I had been stabbed, perhaps mortally, frightened me, as the fear of death will frighten any healthy youth, but when I had reached the water's edge I felt so much relieved I had hopes the wound was not of a serious nature. And these hopes were mightily raised when I opened my coat and shirt. Blood there was everywhere about me, and plenty of it, but the comfort lay in the packet of papers which had caused so much trouble, for they were across the wound, and when I drew them out of my bosom where I had hidden them,

The Flight

they almost fell apart in my hands, for the red-skin's knife had well-nigh severed them. The compacted papers had saved my life, even as they had once placed it in jeopardy. As they had borne the brunt of the attack, so, by daylight, they showed the force of the red-skin's thrust. It was as though the hand of my dead father had been raised to intercept the blow.

I felt no pain whatever, nor any great degree of physical discomfort, as I paused and waited for the return of Spaulding. Nor did I have to wait for long. His large bulk, appearing through the darkness, was rendered apparently larger by the inanimate form of the girl he carried in his arms. With no attempt towards concealment, he moved rapidly on and into the lake, knee-deep, his only greeting being, "Follow along, lad, if ye can; they be close upon us." But I answered nothing, only following blindly after him, wondering the while if the girl had received a wound or had but fainted. When we arrived at the bateau I clambered aboard in a great hurry, being helped by the noise of our pursuers, while Spaulding laid the girl on the centre thwart, and, giving the craft a powerful push, drew himself in over the end. The impetus of the start sent us far into the lake, but, instead of taking the paddles and continuing our progress, the voyageur sank on to the seat, and, burying his face in his hands, groaned aloud. I was about to ask him if he had been hurt and how, when plainly to my ear came the crashing of bushes as a party of men arrived at the water's edge. I could see nothing of them, but from the noise they made I could locate them accurately, and might have planted a rifle-bullet among them had it not been for the flash of the shot betraying our whereabouts.

CHAPTER XXI

IN THE WILDERNESS

THEREFORE, I sat without moving or speaking, though with my mind perturbed at the distress of Spaulding, the uncertain state of his sister, and the possible seriousness of my own wound. For a long time no word was spoken or sound made. The risen wind was blowing strongly the while, drifting us down the lake in a line with the shore, neither inward nor outward, as I could see by the tree-tops; but we were going from the scene of so much tragedy, and that alone was a comfort.

Presently Spaulding raised his head and bent over the girl. "She yet lives," he said, more to himself than to me.

My heart, selfishly engrossed in myself, sank low as I heard his words.

"How was she hurt?" I whispered. "I fancied she had only fainted from fright or misuse."

"Aye, misuse enough," he answered. "First 'twas poor Felix, the like of whom for faithfulness God never made. Then 'tis you, ye poor lad, who have had hurt enough without this night's work; an' now the last stroke comes to my gentle sister Jessie. For three years Felix an' I searched for the lass ere we came across her whereabouts—ere we found her at Frontenac. Then we played for weeks—aye, months—to get her, an' now it comes to this. May God give me strength

In the Wilderness

to punish them who have this day taken the light from my life!"

I was shocked despite my own physical weakness. I could not fathom how the girl could have been fatally injured, but there she lay, an inert mass barely outlined through the darkness.

"How was she hurt?" I again asked.

"Stabbed, like ye, an' by the Abnakis. She lay where he dropped her, covered with blood an' the same as dead, as ye may see."

A sob broke from him, but, controlling himself, he picked up a paddle and began urging the boat farther from the shore.

This statement came to me with peculiar effect, as I laughed aloud, a laugh without mirth and due to a sudden relaxation, for even as he spoke the solution of the matter broke upon me.

"Nay, Leonard," I replied, as I saw him stop paddling and attempt to peer at me through the darkness, "the blood on her is mine, for across her I was thrown by the savage, and it was while there that the Eel found his knife and struck me."

"Your blood, lad!" he said, as though grappling with a hope.

"Aye," I answered, with an unmistakable ring of joy in my voice. "Why should the red-skin wish to kill the girl? I have little doubt that he was carrying her off to return her to De Mantel for a price. He was carrying her when I fastened on to him."

He stooped to his sister, gathering her close to him, even as I had once done when she was a child; then he leaped to his feet with a force that set the bateau to rocking, heavy and stanch though it was.

"Lad, lad," he returned, in an intense whisper, "say not so if it is but to try an' comfort me. If ye are right I promise to love ye like a brother for lifting the

The Strength of the Weak

burden. To what straits will not a man's fancy bring him. I owe ye my life, my son, an' also my sister's for the daring of the Abnakis. Faith, I think ye be right!"

This little additional excitement, although it was softened by a sense of relief, did me no good, for from my wound I was losing so much blood that I felt the weakness of a faint creeping over me. I would fain have looked to myself, but the voyageur said:

"Find me the leather bottle in the pack behind ye; it has been filled with *aqua vitæ*. Have a care, my son, an' start not; Felix lies in your way forward."

I turned to obey him, and finally found the bottle, though, for all his warning, I blundered on to the body of the dead man, and laid my hand upon his cold and stiffened face ere I was aware of his proximity. This in the dark, and I being unused to death, gave me a start I did not soon forget and put a period to my immediate usefulness, for even as I was holding the bottle towards the voyageur I collapsed.

The balance of the night was like a troubled dream, and it was just past gray dawn when I came to myself with the sense of being very cold. The sky was still sombre and there was no motion to the boat. I raised my head and saw the bateau was empty, and, further, that it had been drawn with an end on the land, and to me it was a strange land, too. I was alone, even the body of Felix having disappeared, and had I not caught sight of the packs and the arms, now neatly stored forward, I should doubtless have fallen into a panic and fancied I had been deserted. I noticed, too, that the mast was set and its canvas lay at its foot, as though it had been but recently taken down. Doubtless we had been sailing through the night, but at what point we had arrived was a total enigma to me. I turned myself a bit to test myself, and, save for a benumbing stiffness and the fact that my shirt had become glued to my body,

In the Wilderness

I was in no very sorry state. I got to my feet with some difficulty and stepped ashore. The cold of the early hour went to my bones, but I thanked it as I shivered, for it had closed the lips of my wound and kept down inflammation.

For all its strangeness to me, the land about was lovely in its wildness. There were no woods close to the shore. The sand, like that of a sea beach, ran back some distance, and there then came a stretch of meadow grass, among which were a few bushes and some immense boulders, vine-clad and looking soft and billowy. Even the trees near the open were vine-clad, and the whole land had a parklike effect that made me think there must be some large habitation near at hand. Off in the water lay a small island, and a number of others showed at a distance, but the whole prospect was veiled in the haze of early dawn, and the windless quiet of the scene was perfect.

I had no mind to search for my missing companions even had I been able. By the absence of the body of Felix I guessed their errand, and knew they would return; but it became necessary to get some warmth into my bones, and to that end, and also to test myself, I started to walk along the hard sand. I had not got three paces from the boat, however, when I spied Jessie coming along the little beach. When she saw me she quickened her pace, holding out her hand as she came up to me, a little smile brightening her wan face.

"Leonard is seeing the last of poor Felix," she said, even before I could question her. "He sent me back to look after you. You are better. My brother would not let me disturb you even to dress your wound. May I thank you for what you have done?"

"When you let me thank you," I returned. "Were you hurt last night? Your brother thought you dead."

"I was badly frightened," she answered, brightly.

The Strength of the Weak

"But you are to be quiet. I should not have left you so long. You are cold."

I was indeed, and I could not repress the chill that shook me.

"Brother Leonard would not let me cover you; he said you needed the cold. But now you must let me dress your wound, m'sieur le seigneur."

The formal use of my title at this time and under these circumstances struck me as colder than the cold air, and depressed me. If I looked as reproachful as I felt the girl would have noticed it; but if she did, she only showed it by being more solicitous of my physical well-being without seeming to care as to my mental state.

"Where are we?" I asked, changing the subject, and noticing for the first time that she was entirely unarmed. "Does your brother let you wander on a strange shore without protection?"

"There is nothing to fear here," she answered. "We are on an island like one of those yonder, only much larger. But you have no right to be standing about with a raw wound unattended. Let me see to it; it was received in my service and is mine to care for, m'sieur le seigneur."

"Very well, Mademoiselle Spaulding," I returned, fairly nettled. "If you are as careful of my hurt as of my worn-out title, I shall doubtless mend rapidly. But I will wait for your brother. Dressing a wound is not pleasant business."

The only notice she took of my intended irony was to say: "You are a little strange, this morning, m'sieur. But I have dressed many a wound. At Frontenac I was sometimes, and for months, the only white woman in the fort, and there were many wounds from fights and animals. Padre Delande taught me many things besides philosophy."

"Philosophy!" I exclaimed.

In the Wilderness

“Aye, the philosophy of contentment, or, rather, patience—a quality I most needed. The philosophy of matters and things in general, and which was, usually, far beyond me, and, I suspect, far beyond the old gentleman himself. Among other things, he taught me that, as a rule, it was useless to cross the will of a stubborn man, especially a young man; but from the debt I owe you I *will* cross you, and will persist in doing it, so you may as well unbend and have your wound dressed now. You will obey me, m’sieur.”

This was said with such a mixture of coquetry and mock severity that it was simply bewitching, and yet through it I could see that she was really serious in her purpose. It was a pleasure to submit, but the only pleasure of the whole matter was in the submitting, for, as was inevitable, she hurt me cruelly. Whether she robbed her own costume to obtain linen, or whether, with a woman’s foresight, she had provided against the accident of wounds, I know not; but the compress came when needed, the shirt was soaked from the wound, and the state of my hurt ascertained. It was found that the papers had so deflected the knife of the savage that the cut was more ugly than serious; for, though it lay across my ribs for six inches, it was barely half an inch deep, and had resulted in nothing more than loss of blood and consequent weakness. However, it would require care and complete quiet for a time on my part.

Like many another, from the moment I found my hurt was not one to threaten life, I turned my attention more to the nurse than to my own condition, treating the latter with heroic carelessness, both from relief that it was no worse and a callow desire for effect. But I did not conceal from her how horribly frightened I had been at first, nor attempt to veil too closely the motive I had for leaping unarmed and in the dark upon her then unknown abductor. After the dressing was over, to-

The Strength of the Weak

gether we sat on the sand and talked, and I gathered from her how her brother had brought her out of her long faint and of his extravagant joy at her recovery; how he would not let my wound be touched in the darkness; how he had got up the little sail and fled down the river, and how he had taken his dead friend in his arms, like a baby, and borne it away somewhere, she was not sure where. Her face was pale from anxiety and loss of sleep, but her sweet brown eyes were clear and deep as she appealed to me (it is the only way I can describe her glance), or fixed her gaze dreamily on the prospect now brightening in the rapidly gaining day. For all that her round chin was firm, that her small mouth betrayed no lack of character, and her eyes were ready to prove her self-reliance over the barrel of a rifle; for all that her costume was more than a shade masculine and still betrayed the dark stain of blood from my wound, her hands browned by exposure, and her attitude as unconventional as her movements were free and unrestrained by a false sense of propriety; for all these, there was something so deliciously feminine, sweet, and attractive about her as she sat in the sand, with her fingers interlaced about her knees, such an air of helpless appeal in her glance (an appeal utterly impossible to interpret) that I was fairly carried away as I watched her. The thin wall of formality she built between us, which was shown more in the way she addressed me than in aught else, and which held me at arm's length, was exasperating. I would have broken this down, and even tried to, but the quiet "m'sieur le seigneur" would be shot back at me even in the face of my too familiar "Jessie," though in no other way did she show signs of resentment. In short, it soon dawned upon me that I was a friend to whom she felt under obligations for past favours. It appeared that now, as our lives ran parallel, she would admit me as an intimate, and for

In the Wilderness

the time take no notice of my presumption. She would repay my past favours with sweetness and service, as she had done by dressing my wound; she would show her confidence and her innocence at once, as she had done by taking my hand the night before; but she would evidently have me to understand that I stood without the pale of her possible affections; that to her I was as the sea is to the shore—close, yet forever and entirely distinct. There was a vague unrest in this; a disappointment, which, in my ignorance, I failed to analyze. Had the circumstances been different I might have suspected the cause, but I was too practical just then. Events had made me so.

I wondered why we had gone down the river instead of up and onward towards our destination; but I preferred to listen to her rather than ask questions, and when she had finished her narrative of the night's doings I had no chance, for then it was that her brother reappeared. He was quiet, and there was a suspicious redness to his eyes which made me warm to him. He explained shortly that as De Mantel had known of our intended route to the English settlements—that is, up the Richelieu and along Champlain and Lac Saint Sacrement,* that the way to evade immediate pursuit was to go down the river (as had been done) and then return and follow our enemies, instead of being hurried by them. Our expedition had become demoralized by the advent of the French soldiers, the death of Felix, and my own wound. The voyageur maintained that we had in reality gained but little beyond liberty, and even now had but slight hold upon that if we attempted to move too fast.

“Were I alone,” he said, “I might make a fist at striking straight south o’ here, through the wilderness; but with ye sick an’ sore an’ but half a woodsman, and

* Now Lake George.

The Strength of the Weak

with the lass, even though she be all grit, it would be impossible. North o' the New Hampshire Grants the red-skins are hostile to all whites, an' 'tis a poor section to travel. We must go by the lakes an' take our chances, but 'tis my advice that we lay on this island for a spell that matters yonder may quiet an' that ye have time to mend. The days will not be lost by being idly spent."

CHAPTER XXII

“ HALTE LÀ ”

THE suggestion was acted upon as a matter of course, and for two weeks we remained upon that island. The boat was concealed, and we retired to the woods, to be beyond the ken of passing craft, though we were well out of the main channel of the St. Lawrence and the more traveled waters. And now I look back upon those days as at a time (like an oasis in the desert of life) when I was at perfect peace with myself and the world, and breathed without a feeling of danger. And yet there was danger always. Spaulding harped on the Abnakis until I got to hate the name of the red-skin, though I had no fear of him then. I little knew of the persistence of the copper-hued Algonquin, though the voyageur emphasized it enough.

“ The Eel has a rifle now,” he said; “ for there is small doubt he found the one Jessie dropped in the scrimmage. With that he is my equal, an’ ye may wager he is on his way to Isle aux Noix ere this. He will find at the camp there that we have not passed, then he will try back. I tell ye, lad, he will follow to the settlement—aye, even to Dummerston, an’ in the guise o’ a runner. It may take him months, but he will hunt me until he has me or I have him. Ye know him not, but I know him an’ he knows me. He is the devil incarnate, an’ what is life worth to me with him livin’. He has not the openness of the Iroquois; an’ if he pots me, as he fain would do, it will be from ambush, unless, indeed, I mark him first, which God grant.”

The Strength of the Weak

But even with this I fancy the voyageur had little fear of him so long as we remained where we were ; but we were ever cautious.

The beach was deserted by day, and no fire was kindled save at night, and that was small and carefully shaded. Our shelter was simple, being made of the boat's sail thrown over bent boughs, a habitation known as a "wickie-up" ; but the weather was fine, as a rule, and we suffered nothing worse than an occasional wetting. My wound knitted fast and healed ; my strength came back with the abundance of food and the rest, for of the former there was no lack, game being plentiful either on the island or the mainland, and the latter could be had by the taking. And when at last Spaulding determined it was time to move, I was in perfect physical condition, as were the others, and God knows we were to need the equipment.

I was now perfectly aware from what source sprang my happiness, my redundancy of health and spirits. I was fairly enmeshed. I was deeply in love with the girl, for it would have been impossible for mortal man to have spent two weeks in close companionship with her and not have fallen before her. I fell, but I fell in silence, and in silence I remained.

She had not abated the distance between us, nor had I the temerity to overleap it, even had the time and conditions been propitious. She had lessened the severity of my title, however, and now called me "m'sieur," but the rest of it was fairly indicated by the little pause and the respect she showed me. She was never flippant, but often demurely serious, and I always followed her moods (for we were constantly together), never trying to find an explanation for an unusual fit of soberness on her part or the distant objective of her "far-away" moods.

To speak of the future, even of leaving the island,

“ Halte Là ”

was sure to end in a brooding silence on her part, which would last perhaps an hour. She was willing enough to get to Albany, but she appeared to dread her old home at Dummerston, and once, when in an unusually buoyant mood, her brother teased her as he lay on his back smoking, and said :

“ Ah, lass, at home the old house is waiting its mistress ! We must get ye a husband, an’ I will turn the place over to ye, holding only the right to shelter in my old age.”

And then she looked at him soberly for a moment, but suddenly dropped her face into her hands and sobbed outright, from old memories, I thought.

But her sombre moments were infrequent, and mine never came. I was too full of youth and health and the wealth of spirit that comes with loving a woman (even when the affection is not returned) to be heavily troubled with the responsibility of the present, regret for the past, or fear for the future. I was blinded by the golden dust of first affection, and all the world was paradise, all seasons were to be summer. It was enough for me to know that fortune had thrown us together, and bid fair to keep us together for some time to come. Beyond that I did not attempt to penetrate.

As for her, she was no drawback to us for being a woman. In climbing she would decline my hand and help with a laugh, as though the offering had been a joke. She could load a rifle as quickly as I, and shoot as accurately, though we made but few trials at this, for powder was precious. I could excel her in nothing she undertook save fleetness of foot, main strength, and fencing. Our arms consisted of two rifles, three pistols, three knives, and my rapier. In the last she became deeply interested, and for many an hour I amused myself in teaching her the principles of fencing, an art she

The Strength of the Weak

took to readily enough, but might never excel in, owing to a lack of stiffness of wrist.

But it was glorious sport to watch her—aye, to feast upon her as she faced me and threw her soul into an attempt at prodding me over the heart with the stick she used as a foil. The white of her neck and throat and the brown-red of her cheek were ever fluctuating; her little teeth would set and her red lips part; her eyes would deepen with the intensity of her purpose. She would stamp her small foot in impatience at her numberless vain attempts to “run me through,” as she termed it, attempts which I frustrated by the simplest turn of the wrist, and finally, when I would open my guard and allow her to strike home, the ripple of relief that would pass over her face would be simply delightful. Then we would fall into a mock quarrel as to whether I had allowed her to make the stroke, or had been helpless, ending in a laugh and a race for home. We were boy and girl together, thank God, save for the everlasting formality of address. We became man and woman in a stride, and far too soon; but even when trouble, danger, and fatigue had sobered us both, when the night was blackest, before there came the herald of the approaching dawn, she was forever the same sweet, considerate, patient, courageous, yet deliciously weak mortal.

How could such perfection, physical and mental, have grown from the demoralized slip of a maiden, pale from rage and fear, I had pitied but a few short years before? It was the butterfly from the chrysalis, and 'twas small wonder that she had subdued even such a villain as De Mantel into loving her.

And the scene changed without shattering my rainbow. The days wagged on—aye, flew on—and it was well into July ere we found ourselves afloat again. We were several days behind our intended date of moving.

“ Halte Là ”

The fine weather had held the wind against us, and when we finally started it was in an easterly storm that chilled the body and depressed the spirits. But the gale bowled us along rapidly, and the veil of mist and rain added to our safety in traversing the lake, for it screened us from the land and sent smaller craft scuttling for shelter.

We held fairly close to the southern shore, so that we passed the Seigneury De Mantel and saw nothing of it. It was nightfall when we struck the current of the Richelieu River, but, instead of halting to camp and rest, Spaulding turned into it, and we went onward, wet and cold and unmolested, although we had now entered the region of constant peril, for the Richelieu was one end of the grand and only roadway betwixt New France and the English colonies.

The wind had hauled so the useless sail was taken down, and we were paddling the heavy craft along the east bank, Spaulding in front, I astern, and the girl half-sitting, half-lying on the bottom in the waist or centre of the boat. Suddenly she raised her head and listened, and, as though by instinct, the voyageur turned the bow of the craft landward and shot us into the bushes. The crashing of twigs and the grating of the bottom had ceased, but yet I could hear nothing alarming; indeed, nothing save the rustle of wet leaves about us and the hissing fall of the rain as it struck the foliage. Not one of us moved, and presently I caught the sound of voices and the dip and lift of paddles, and through the gathering gloom I saw two bateaux filled with men, French soldiers, slide slowly by, and following them came two small canoes containing Indians, six in all. There was nothing remarkable in the presence of the red-skins, for it was now well known that the French had enlisted a majority of the Algonquin tribes, and the party of soldiers without its squad of savages was an exception.

The Strength of the Weak

Had it been daylight we would have been within full sight, but the darkness and the additional shadow of the land protected us. I did not see the necessity of hiding at this stage of the journey, for we were not yet in a section of the river that was patrolled. Had we met the party which had just passed, in all probability we would have had but a few awkward questions to answer, as there was nothing suspicious in either ourselves or our outfit, and we were not yet near enough to the frontier to be mistaken for a party of English. I so expressed myself to Spaulding, and he said :

“ If we were in the open and chanced to be overhauled by a party from Montreal or Frontenac, or any point up the river, I care little, lad ; but to be fastened to by those from down the river is another matter, an’ I take no chances. I tell ye, my son, our fame has spread to Quebec by this, an’ ye are known from there to La Chevelure an’ Ticonderoga ere now, an’ so is the lass, an’ so am I. I doubt not that they have looked for us to pass this fortnight. We will fool them yet. But one more day an’ we take to the woods ; ye cannot dodge on the water as ye can in the wilderness.”

We paddled all that night, and were undisturbed. There was little danger in the darkness, for the river was here wide and unbroken and the current not as swift as it becomes farther south. By day we hid on the shore, drawing the boat well out of sight, and at early dusk, the river being clear, we again embarked. It was to be our last night’s travel by water, and it was with no degree of regret that I looked forward to abandoning the paddle, for I was already tired of our slow progress and the ceaseless strain of urging along the cumbersome bateau ; for, though healed, my wound had not yet hardened, and the plying of the paddle irritated it, making it tender. I had far rather trust to my own legs for speed and safety than to the river, any turn of which

“ Halte Là ”

might disclose some cause for delay, if not an absolute danger.

We had now progressed so far south that the stream had narrowed a little, and, instead of being entirely open, it was here and there broken by small islands, pine-covered or rich with deciduous verdure, pictures of peace and beauty in the half-light of the summer evening. The weather had cleared and the night grown warm. Our progress and the near approach of freedom from the paddle had raised my spirits, and I was looking at life through bright eyes. I was even humming a tune below my breath as we drove betwixt two small islets, in order to avoid the increasing current in the open, when I was startled by the challenge of “ *Qui vive*,” the ring of a musket, and the fiercer cry of another and harsher voice, “ *Halte là*.”

CHAPTER XXIII

GUESTS OR PRISONERS?

THE island from which came this demand was half a pistol-shot away, and had our vessel been a light one, or had we at the time a favourable wind, we might have continued our course and ignored the interruption, for the dusk was now deep enough to make a shot from the shore a matter of chance. Escape naturally arose in my mind, as it undoubtedly did in Spaulding's, who continued paddling as though he had marked nothing, though I heard him mutter a forcible "The devil!" But my hope of getting away without further trouble faded in a moment, for scarcely had the echo of the challenge died when I saw a canoe put out from a point of land ahead of us. Then the voyageur gave vent to a round English oath and ceased paddling.

"Lad," he said, under his voice, "I am but your guide to La Chevelure; Jessie is your sister; ye be French; take yer cue as ye find it. Stand up an' receive them."

"There are but two in the canoe," I said, as I marked but that number silhouetted against the bright water.

"'Tis folly to try defence by arms unless, so be, ye know the number of the party behind them," he returned. "Your head is not the only one at stake. Were we alone we might fight; but there's Jessie—what of the girl if we fight an' lose?"

This argument against trying to escape through force of arms was too clear to admit of reply, and

Guests or Prisoners?

I threw down my paddle without further words and stood up that the oncomers might see I was not armed against them. My heart beat rapidly as they approached, for the transition from tranquility to active peril had been sudden, and my past experience with the military had not been of a character to reassure me. During the few moments I stood there I took to myself the comfortable reflection that we were in no danger unless recognised, and that perhaps we had stumbled on a regular patrol, the French army lying nearer than we had anticipated. It might be possible to glean some very necessary information, for as we progressed it would become imperative that we should not be ignorant upon matters pertaining to the troops and the disposition of the Indians.

If we were to be cleared by tact instead of force, the whole matter rested on my shoulders for the time, yet, try as I would, my brain refused to work and formulate a story. It simply whirled about over matters completely foreign to the situation. I knew this to be pure nervousness born of inexperience, but it caused me untold suffering as I watched the approach of the canoe. I thought of everything under the sky above me save what I should call myself and what I should give as the errand of the party, these being points upon which clear answers would be necessary. I had not dreamed of ever being more than a second to the voyageur. That he, for any reason, would force me to be the spokesman never occurred to me, so thoroughly had I leaned upon him; yet now I was to bear the brunt of our first interruption, and my brain had become useless. I thought of the depth of the water, the width of the river, the lovely purple shadow of the island ahead, and the ragged outline of a gigantic hemlock that rose above the woods on the shore; these, among other things, but nothing to the purpose. I think the Lord took me in his hands

The Strength of the Weak

at that moment (if, indeed, he has not all of us at all times, would we but allow him to guide us), for just as the canoe drew alongside and I made out a soldier and a *sous officier* I thought of the forgotten pass I had forged and placed in my pocket. With this as a nucleus for thought I was steadying my brain when we were hailed.

"What is your errand, m'sieurs, and why so late upon the river? Do you not know the regulations?"

"We are from Frontenac and know nothing of the frontier," I replied, like an automaton. "May we not travel by night?"

"Have you a pass?"

"Something to take its place, at least," I answered, my heart going like a drum.

The voyageur had been sitting in the attitude of a tired habitant, his shoulders slouched forward, and his head so hanging that if he was looking at me at all he was looking through his eyebrows. As I spoke he raised himself, as though to be prepared for anything that might come.

"What is your name, m'sieur?" asked the officer. "Who is of your party and where are you bound?"

The tone of the questioner was polite. I knew not what guided me, but I answered promptly enough:

"M'sieur, I am the Seigneur de Mantel, the lady is my sister, and the man forward my guide and servant, Felix by name."

Now, I had no more idea of saying this when the question was put than I had of leaping overboard and attempting to escape by swimming. For a moment I was aghast at my own answer, but I gathered some comfort for some unknown reason when I marked the voyageur pull his pipe from his pocket and proceed to fill it. The girl did not stir.

Guests or Prisoners?

There was plain deference in the young man's manner as he answered.

"Nevertheless, I must inform you that you cannot pass. If you are as you state, all will be well, but my instructions are to bring in those who are upon the river after sunset. If your papers are right you can continue your journey in the morning."

"And if I am determined to continue now?" I asked.

"M'sieur had better not attempt it," the officer answered, with a smile and a characteristic shrug of the shoulders. "I should do my duty, and if he escaped me he would probably be stopped by those far less generous. M'sieur is probably unaware that the savages, under De St. Pierre, are in great force on both banks of the river but a few miles above."

I knew nothing of it, nor did the fact have time to influence me, for ere I could thank my stars for having found it out the voyageur broke in gruffly:

"M'sieur le seigneur, if that is so I refuse to go on. I made no bargain to guide you through a gantlet or travel by night. I go ashore."

I hardly needed the hint, which was broad enough, but I followed the lead he gave me, and, telling him sharply to speak when his advice was asked, I turned to the officer and said:

"I am forced to obey, m'sieur. I really had no intention of doing otherwise, but it seems a pity to waste time when hurried. Where is the baron's headquarters?"

"To the south. That is all I know, m'sieur. Perhaps the captain can tell you. Please follow close."

And with this he turned the canoe towards the land, we passively following.

The officer had not again demanded my destination, neither had he appeared suspicious at the name of De Mantel. This latter did not surprise me, for, consider-

The Strength of the Weak

ing the record of the rightful owner of the name, I believed he was not proud of it, and rarely if ever used it after his arrival in New France. Therefore, it would not be universally known. But whether known or not, I was now obliged to hold it.

As we followed our leader I had some doubts as to the ending of this interruption, but my head was no longer harassed by uncertainty. My story lay clear before me. By the pass (which I would doubtless be compelled to show) I was bound for the headquarters of the Baron Dieskau, and my tale must be consistent, let the outcome be what it might. My hope and belief was that the fraud would work and we could continue on our way in the morning, desert the boat after moving up the river a short distance, flank the Indians ahead of us by a wide detour, and then have little save the inconveniences of the wilderness to retard our progress.

I distinctly recollect that short journey to the river's bank, for the reason that it was towards the point on which grew the giant hemlock I had noticed. As we struck the shore I marked drawn up on the land two bateaux like our own, but larger, and a birch-bark canoe, its fellow being occupied by the guard. I immediately connected the boats with the squad which had passed us the evening before, but my curiosity on that matter was not great.

Like one who knew his place and his business, Spaulding drew the bateau up the shelving beach, then, squatting on the ground beside it, puffed contentedly at his pipe, making no move to go farther. I gave my hand to Jessie, who simply looked at me with inquiring gaze as she noticed the dogged taciturnity of her brother, but she made no motion towards him. What he had in mind I knew not. I felt, however, that thus far my actions had suited him, and with an offhand command to keep an eye on the contents of the boat, I picked

Guests or Prisoners ?

up my rapier, more as a badge of my rank and gentility than as an arm, and, hand in hand with the girl, followed the *sous officier*, the soldier remaining behind.

We had not proceeded many paces ere we were challenged, but were allowed to pass. When within one hundred yards from the shore there came to my eyes the glow of a fire, and a few steps brought us to an opening in the woods. From the centre of this natural clearing rose the mighty hemlock I had seen from the river. Nor is it strange that the immense bole of the tree was the first thing I noticed. Here, indeed, was the lord of the forest, magnificent in its dignity ; a straight shaft that might have been one of the pillars of heaven, branchless until it had towered nigh a hundred feet. It could not have been less than three hundred years old. A group of tents was at its foot, against it leaned a dozen muskets, while near it was a fire around which were a number of soldiers, evidently cooking. There were no savages in sight, though another and smaller fire a short distance away showed me where they had probably gathered.

Before the door or opened flap of the largest tent were two young men fencing, but, by the laughing remarks from the four officers who sat watching them, I judged it to be a friendly bout with buttoned swords.

It was an ideal spot for a camp. Generation upon generation of fallen needles from the great tree had killed all underbrush and laid a brown and level carpet delightful to foot and eye.

As we entered the circle of the clearing and the fire-light fell upon us we were at once sighted by the group at the tent. The fencing ceased, and an officer, a captain, doubtless, for his uniform was exactly similar to that once worn by De Mantel, advanced to meet us. There was anything but severity in his voice as he said :

“ Who have you here, Carlos ? ”

The Strength of the Weak

"Travelers up the river, *mon capitaine*; these and their guide, a *coursur-de-bois*, who remains by the boat," returned the guard, halting and saluting.

"The Seigneur de Mantel, his sister, and attendant," I interrupted.

A look of curiosity passed over the officer's face as he noted our travel-stained costumes and the Indian-like garments of Jessie. It was followed at once by one of interest as he remarked the peculiar beauty of the maiden, and his eyes, suspicious enough despite the kindliness of his voice, dwelt long upon her in that open and impudent admiration affected in those days by men of undoubted rank towards females of none. The girl dropped her head and stepped a pace backward. I was about resenting his gaze and long silence in return for my self-introduction, when he spoke.

"You can verify your statement, m'sieur."

I drew forth the crumpled pass.

"We are somewhat long upon our journey," I said, as an apology for our rusty appearance. But the Frenchman appeared to take no notice of my words, for unfolding the paper he stepped towards the fire and read it. He came back with hurried steps, holding out his hand.

"M'sieur le seigneur, I beg a thousand pardons for my suspicions, but you will grant my right to them under the circumstances. Any one under the protection of the count has my friendship also. The pass is a little irregular, but it will answer; the count is not of the line. I knew the gentleman well in France. A recent title, I believe. His family name is—is——"

"Dessonier," I ventured, with a sudden hurry to my blood.

"Exactly, exactly—Armand Dessonier. A lively comrade. But the paper speaks of two attendants m'sieur."

Guests or Prisoners?

I had entirely forgotten it, and now quickly realized the truth of the adage anent a liar having a good memory. I gave a little gulp as I fenced for time, but I was fairly up to my inquisitor as I answered:

"True; the count was to lend me one of his guard as an escort—a conscript—but at the last moment changed his mind."

"It matters little. I see you are for head-quarters. Where are you from, m'sieur?"

"Fort Frontenac on the Ontario," I answered promptly, looking him in the eye.

"'Tis true. It comes to me now. The count was ordered to Frontenac. He spoke of some estates in New France. You know him well, then."

"I know him well, m'sieur."

"Then you know enough to care for your pocket, m'sieur. Ha-ha! Is it not so?" Here he turned and called towards the tent: "Ho, Meltonne! Here is a friend of a friend of yours; come and compare scars."

CHAPTER XXIV

I HEAR NEWS

AT his call, directed towards the group he had left, not only did the officer indicated arise, but the entire squad of five young men sauntered towards us. I was not prepared for this, nor did I wish Jessie to run the gantlet of the multiplied insult of their gaze. With what dignity I could command I turned to the captain.

"M'sieur, are we to be detained? And if so, will you see that my sister is taken to shelter at once? She is tired and does not care to meet strangers."

"You are right," he exclaimed, hastily. "Here, Carlos," he called to the man who stood awaiting his dismissal, "clear out a tent, double up your men, and stand a guard over Mademoiselle—Mademoiselle—" Here he looked at me interrogatively.

"Mademoiselle Jessie de Mantel," I put in.

"Scotch, ah!" he exclaimed. "As odd as its owner is beautiful." And he made a low bow.

The girl turned crimson in the firelight, but whether at the name or the open admiration shown her I knew not. I took her hand to reassure her, and lifted it to my lips with the respect I had all my life shown my mother, only more carelessly as seemed to fit the relation of brother and sister, yet formally, as became our surroundings. The touch put fire in me. As I dropped her hand the officer sprang forward.

"Might I, too, have the honour——"

"Nay, m'sieur," I said, stepping before him, "my

I Hear News

sister is yet young—very young. I would not have her too broadly complimented.” Then turning to the girl, whose flushed features had given way to absolute paleness, I said: “Go, Jessie. I will bring you your pack as soon as Felix arrives with it.”

She turned towards the soldier and followed him with an unlooked-for willingness, and had but got out of earshot when the group of young officers arrived, disappointed, doubtless, at missing a sight of a woman’s face. The captain waved his hand towards me as he said:

“Gentlemen, the Seigneur de Mantel, travelling to head-quarters on business of his own. I have not inquired into private matters, as he is under the protection of our old acquaintance, Armand Dessonier, the Count de Lune.”

They bowed stiffly and looked at me with eyes none too friendly, I thought. The tallest of the quintette (one of the fencers) swept me with his eyes from head to foot, then, turning on his heel, remarked audibly to the others:

“M’sieur looks as though he had staked all but his body—and lost.”

“Come, come, Meltonne,” said the captain, “have your losses so soured you that you cannot do justice to a fellow sufferer? The seigneur is a friend of Dessonier’s—I beg his pardon, of the count’s. I fancy he can help you to curse him. I never knew a man to play against him and win. Did you not lose, m’sieur le seigneur?”

“Heavily,” I returned, with a forced laugh.

“Well, if you seek him for revenge, you had better tell your beads—he will even take them,” returned the younger man.

“Where is he now, Meltonne?” asked the captain.

“Nearer than I wish he was,” came the surly answer.

The Strength of the Weak

"He was at Isle aux Noix when I left. We will probably see him to-morrow unless he has been ordered away."

"My faith, but you will have a chance for revenge yourself," said the officer, laughing; "and the seigneur, too. M'sieur, let me tell you that you are in good fortune to be stopped by my guard. General the Baron Dieskau is at Isle aux Noix, having shifted his headquarters temporarily from La Chevelure. We break camp and join him to-morrow. Of course you will go with us. It is much safer than going by water without an escort."

It was fortunate that he turned to the rest as he continued speaking, else he might have seen the change that came over my face at this unexpected piece of news and the implied invitation, which was the same as a command. "Gentlemen," he added, "it is my opinion that the baron means to attack Johnson instead of waiting behind defences for that party's pleasure."

"William Johnson?" I asked, with a perceptible quaver in my voice; for my heart was like lead as I realized our proximity to head-quarters and an enemy who would be overjoyed to see me.

"Yes, that same half-savage, bloodsucking Englishman," was the answer. "They say he has a squaw for a wife or mistress, and that she is a Samson for strength. It is well known that he rules the Iroquois as though he was of their blood, and has enlisted them against us. At all events, it is true that he has left the banks of the Mohawk, raised a ragged army at Albany, and is now on his way to the head of Saint Sacrement gathering supplies for an attack on La Chevelure."

The speaker had evidently not noticed my trepidation, and by the time he finished talking I had pulled myself together and resolved not to be taken by surprise again. But if the captain had taken no notice of my

I Hear News

sudden lowness of spirits, the young lieutenant called Meltonne had, and it was in a half-contemptuous, half-patronizing, and wholly disagreeable manner, a manner suiting his expression, that he said:

"Have no fear, m'sieur seigneur. We will protect you. You and the lady are in no danger from that underbred. Is he your *bête noire*?"

"M'sieur," I replied, quietly, "I have no fear for myself; but I am justified in fearing for my sister if disaster should overtake our army. All things are possible."

"Can you compare this woodsman to General Dieskau and then speak of possibilities?" returned the young man warmly, and with a poorly concealed sneer. "*Sacré!* And besides, m'sieur, if your sister's face be as fair as her figure we would all of us lay down our lives for her; it is, perhaps, a fact that you can take care of yourself."

There was no mistaking the meaning of this young fop, who, by his dress, his manner, and the perfume which exhaled from him, might have been fresh from a Parisian *salon*. I had met his ilk in Quebec many a time, but scarce expected to catch the affectation of the court in the wilderness. Why he should endeavour to make himself disagreeable to me, save from in some way having coupled me with De Mantel, who had, doubtless, fleeced him at cards, I could not imagine, unless it was the demonstration of a naturally ugly disposition, and that I think it was. He was haughty enough in tone and bearing, God knows; but it behooved me to keep my temper, for our situation had become desperate and the disaster that threatened us seemed overwhelming. Still I must not bend to this specimen of hot-house society, and so I answered:

"I can always take care of myself, m'sieur. I am only cowardly where my sister is concerned, but then

The Strength of the Weak

not in action. I think she will have no need of the sacrifice of your life in her behalf."

There was ample occasion for retort in this, and there is no telling how the little war of words would have terminated had there not come a diversion; but it was then we were interrupted by the rapid approach of a soldier who bore a folded paper. When within six paces he halted, saluted, and again advanced.

"How did this arrive?" demanded the captain.

"Indian runner," was the terse reply.

"Where is he?"

"Under guard and waiting your honour's pleasure."

The officer ripped open the paper and stepped towards the fire, while the scowl that gathered on his face was plain even in the uncertain light. He sauntered back slowly to the expectant group.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "we shall know nothing of the delights of *Isle aux Noix*. The whole army is to move south. We are to remain here and guard the river for three days longer, and are then to join the regiment at *La Chevelure*. Head-quarters on the island broke up this morning and for a week or so will be at *Carillon*. The general's inspection is over."

There were loud expressions of disappointment at this, for to these men it was a sentence to the bivouac and active service instead of the comparative luxury of garrison life after the wilderness. Next to *Presque Isle*, on the *Allegheny River*, the garrison of *Isle aux Noix* was the most extensive and complete outpost possessed by the French, for at that day *Ticonderoga* was but little better than a name, and *Fort la Chevelure* (afterward *Crown Point*) more a base of supplies than a place of defence. That the English would or could ever penetrate the northern frontier and invade Canada was not dreamed of by a Frenchman, and in consequence the post of *Isle aux Noix*, on the *Richelieu River*, became

I Hear News

more a pocket for the luxuries of civilization in the wilderness than a formidable point from which to dispute the passage of a hostile army. Indeed, the post itself was never to know war at close quarters, for it was promptly evacuated at the approach of the English some years after the time of which I am writing.

But if this piece of news concerning the sudden removal of head-quarters and the continuance of the present guard on the river had been received with a poor grace by the others, to me it was like a reprieve from execution. I knew not what other difficulties might arise; but time had been given for thought and action, and my spirits went up in proportion as those of my new acquaintances went down. Of the group, the individualities of the captain and the young lieutenant, Meltonne, alone impressed me, and their peculiar dispositions were brought out by the character of the news. The disappointment of the commanding officer (undoubtedly a man of high family and the superior of the others both in military and social rank) evidently found solace in the discomfort of his fellows, for his mood grew lighter as their curses deepened. He was, however, not sufficiently their superior in years and wisdom to be shown the respect due to age alone, for as his features relaxed at a decidedly novel and unique oath uttered by Meltonne, that young man's temper vented its displeasure on all those about him, and he even went so far as to politely damn his superior for having imparted the bad news before supper.

There had been a general movement towards the tents, and I took comfort in seeing that one near that belonging to the captain had been emptied of its contents and was already occupied by Jessie, who sat well within it, sheltered from impudent gaze, though having at command a clear view of the entire encampment. I had now but one present desire, and that to get to the

The Strength of the Weak

voyageur without creating suspicion, impart my information, and receive his instructions. As master and servant, I could only send for him, and the chances of talking with him without being overheard, or without creating suspicion if I appeared secret, were few indeed. It occurred to me, however, that I might communicate with him through Jessie, and when it was finally proposed that my supposed sister should grace the officers' mess for the meal about to be served, I firmly refused to allow it, and, moreover, refused to eat with them myself, for I held it only fair to give my company to the girl, who was doubtless worried, and would wish to know how we stood with regard to Dame Fortune. After some protesting, my action was admitted as reasonable, and thus I was in a position to retail to Jessie all I had heard. This took me through the meal, and at its end I returned to my hosts, in order to keep in their good graces, telling the girl to repeat the matter to her brother if she had an opportunity.

CHAPTER XXV

SELF-DEFENCE

THE officers were lying about the fire, smoking. I was in excellent humour as I sat myself among the group, nor had I been there many minutes ere it was proposed to continue the fencing that our arrival had interrupted.

But partly from good sense and partly from bad humour, Meltonne refused to renew the friendly contest on the plea of poor light, forgetting that the conditions would be the same to his opponent. Then was proposed a game that might have been called "dough-ball," for the name they gave it I have forgotten. It was simple, and is played in this wise: A ball of dough, or a biscuit wet and kneaded into a mass, about the size of a man's fist is thrown in the air some ten feet. As it comes down the player is to impale it upon his sword by thrusting horizontally only, never allowing the hilt of his weapon to go below the point. It is a difficult game, calling for a steady hand and a quick eye, and save as a vehicle for betting is of no great interest except to the player. A certain number of throws is allowed to each swordsman.

It seemed satisfactory enough to the officers, who took turns at it with evident relish and varying success, making or losing a quantity of small coin. All were more or less successful, except Meltonne, who made a complete failure of his trial, though by the way he used his body and addressed his sword I knew he must be

The Strength of the Weak

skilled in handling his weapon. Yet he could not impale the ball, or even clip it, and his poor temper was not improved by the failure of his lunges, the laughter that followed them, and the loss of his money, trifling as was the amount of the latter. I had done but little better, having split the ball but once, and had retired with a knowledge that the game called for practice of a certain kind, and that by the jumping light of the fire I could never do myself justice. Thus I had given place to Meltonne, who, I verily believe, had but taken his sword to show his superiority over me, for in the beginning he had refused to enter the contest.

It was his last chance even to tie my score. There was to be one more cast, and as the ball came down he thrust violently at it. The result of his energy was unfortunate. The ground beneath him being slippery with the thickly sown hemlock needles, his foot slid from under him, and to save himself from a fall he drove his sword into the soft earth as a stay. But his weight was too great for the steel, which bent far out of true, then snapped in the centre of the blade. The disaster and ensuing gyrations of the man before he measured his length on the ground called forth shouts of laughter from the onlookers, and for the life of me I could not help joining in the general mirth, and, perhaps from relieved nervous tension, I expressed my sense of his ridiculous posturing quite as loudly as his intimates. Be that as it may, the temper of the fallen man was beyond his control, and it was unfortunate that my face was the first to catch his eye as he got to his feet.

"M'sieur has chosen to laugh at my mishap," he said, loudly. "M'sieur is no gentleman."

"Ten thousand pardons," I returned. "I intended no offence, but you were exquisitely comical." The absurdity of his antics was yet vivid, and I grinned broadly as I spoke.

Self-Defence

"Perhaps m'sieur doubts my skill with the sword," he returned hotly. "Does he desire to test it? He may be able to pierce a lump of dough, but he may find it more difficult to strike a mark the shape and size of a man."

I caught his meaning, and my face straightened at once. I had been possessed of no desire to insult him, and had less desire to fight him or any one, for I hold that a duel in cold blood is no less than attempted murder, and the killing of a human being, unless in self-defence and in the right, is a damning sin in the eyes of the Lord. Since my sharp encounter with my own image in the mirror, my soul had advanced one step, at least. Therefore, I answered:

"M'sieur Meltonne, I am aware that I lay myself open to the charge of cowardice by ignoring your threat; but in plain terms let me say that I have no desire to either kill or wound you, and one or the other would likely be your fate if we crossed swords. I have asked pardon for my laughter; is not that enough?"

"Ho, by St. Louis! A *poule mouillée* and a braggart at once. 'Tis as I thought," he exclaimed, with raised voice and an angry sneer, as he turned to his fellows and indicating me with the stump of the sword he still held in his hand.

This open insult had no effect on me for the moment, for I fully realized the critical position of our party, and that was sufficient to keep my temper under control. And yet I knew that if I failed to pay attention to the outrage both the girl and myself would be at a terrible disadvantage through receiving scant courtesy from those into whose hands we had fallen.

A Frenchman respects nothing as he respects power; despises nothing as he despises any form of physical cowardice; and his thin veneer of gentility is very often too weak to withstand opportunity. If I failed to do

The Strength of the Weak

myself justice by a policy of non-resistance, if I failed to make good my unfortunate brag of superiority in arms, I felt that Jessie might be in danger. What weight to a duke, marquis, or count would be the virtue of the sister of a cowardly Canadian semi-peer? None whatever. Instead of a protection, her beauty would be her ruin, and it would be guessed to a certainty that my relation to a dashing chevalier like De Mantel, or De Lune, was peculiar, and not to be greatly respected, even if it was not looked upon with suspicion.

I thought of all this, and my brain worked rapidly as I sat there apparently unmoved, looking the young officer in the eye. No attempt was made on the part of the others to smooth this breach of hospitality, and perhaps I was not considered a guest as much as a prisoner. No doubt they were willing enough to be entertained by a duel, or perhaps they desired to determine my status; but, whatever the motive, there was plain relief among them that the anger of their brother officer had found a vent outside their own immediate circle.

I had waited long enough for a protest in my behalf, but nothing of the kind forthcoming, I turned to the captain and said:

“M’sieur, as either guest or prisoner I have been outraged by this attack, this open insult offered, and for no other reason than that of joining in a general laugh. I have been threatened by this young man, and no one in authority has seen fit to interfere for my protection; and as I have appeared to boast, it behooves me to make good my word. I must protect myself. I know nothing of this fellow’s title, nor do I wish to have aught to say to him. If you will furnish him with a rapier I will give him satisfaction.”

I bowed to them collectively, stepped from the circle, and went to Jessie’s tent, where I had left my sword, for the one I had used in the game had been borrowed.

Self-Defence

My head was now in something of a whirl, and I knew I must beat my challenger, for only in so doing could I protect myself against the rest. Abject apology would have availed nothing, even had I been in a cowardly mood, which I was not. In those days might was right, and, alas! the spirit of those days still lives in these. The comfort I got out of it all was in thinking that the man must be a remarkably skilful swordsman if he could punish me without being punished himself.

I fancy the girl guessed what was about to happen; but she made no protest as I picked up my rapier, with some remark intended to reassure her, only looking fixedly at me a moment with a kind of wondering look that went to my heart, though I could see little but her eyes. Then she held out her hand and clasped mine as if to bid me good-night, but she did not speak. And so I left her, and I know her blessing was upon me.

Although no return had been made to my speech to the captain, I saw that I was to be taken at my word, for the entire party adjourned to where the ground was more level, a spot something like a rod from the fire, and there Meltonne stood weighing in his hand the several rapiers that had been offered for his selection. No notice was at first taken of my return, and it was plain that I was to have scant respect even if I was not debarred from having justice. But bare justice, the barest, being but born of custom, was not denied me. After a moment of silence, and while my opponent was determining between two blades, the captain said:

“M’sieur de Mantel——”

“You have missed my title, m’sieur,” I asserted stiffly, fully conscious of the present worth of effect. “I am Monsieur *le Seigneur* de Mantel—and you were about saying?”

“I must take your word for your title,” he returned,

The Strength of the Weak

somewhat priggishly; "but I was about to say you had a right to select a second."

"I will represent myself," I answered, with just enough of a bow to be a recognition of his formal offer. "All I desire is fair play from now on; I have not had it hitherto."

"You shall have it, m'sieur. This is hardly serious; a little sport; a trifle of blood. The affair is not *à l'outrance*."

I recognised his words with another slight bow just as one of the officers who had been talking to Meltonne approached me.

"Since you compel me to speak to you directly, in behalf of my friend," he said, "I would ask if first blood is to terminate the bout? You are the challenged party, and can determine."

"Is your friend skilful?" I asked.

"M'sieur, I spoke in your interest, really, not in his. He has few superiors with the foils. This is not a full affair of honour."

I had no intention or desire to kill the young fellow even if I found myself able, and I had sufficient confidence in my own skill to believe he could not kill me. But I wished for this chance, and took it eagerly.

"We will fight until one of us cries for mercy, leaves the field, or is disabled," I replied.

The young officer raised his eyebrows, shrugged his narrow shoulders, bowed, and retired to repeat this to his principal, though none of the group could have failed to hear me. There were no protests at my apparent bloodthirstiness, and never a doubt entered my mind then or since that they would enjoy seeing one man kill another if it was done skilfully and the battle had the slightest excuse. Neither do I think it would have mattered much to the onlookers which of us fell. To them I was as much of a Frenchman as the man I

Self-Defence

was about to fight, and the code of the day was "the weaker goes to the wall."

As I stepped forward to meet my adversary I noticed the soldiers grouped in the middle distance, interested witnesses of what had happened and held still closer by the prospect of bloodletting. Beyond them, and more out of the range of the firelight, I marked the swarthy and mysterious faces of the half-dozen Indians, who had squatted themselves in a half-circle. To the left and near the edge of the clearing Jessie's tent showed pale in the faint glow, while behind and all about the blackness of the forest hedged the prospect.

Without further words my opponent and myself were so placed that the fire was on one side, so that at the start neither might be handicapped by the glare in his eyes; then, throwing off coats and waistcoats, we bowed with the greatest formality and crossed swords.

CHAPTER XXVI

A BLOODLESS COMBAT

AT the onset, so thoroughly had I been grounded by Peyrotte in the laws and principles of fencing, I saw that though my opponent might be, and probably was, a master at the foils, he was a trifle out of his element with the stiffer rapier, though by no means to be despised. It was plain, too, that he was an academy pupil who had been well drilled by his master; but he had not been taught to fence under conditions approaching those existing. But I had; for many had been the twilight, the candle-light, and fire-light lessons Peyrotte had given me. I had fenced with him with the sun at my side, my back, and in my eyes. I had fenced from a height to below, and from a depression to above it. I had fenced on the floor of a floating bateau while he rocked the boat and made me keep on my legs as I went through the parade; for he was used to say, "A man who fights but one way is lame indeed. He may not always defend his life with the sun at his back and his feet on a sure foundation."

And, indeed, Peyrotte was right, for it is probable that under those conditions, and those conditions alone, Meltonne had been taught the art of fencing. The uncertain flashing of the fire, now leaping, now dulled, and forever changing, bothered him, as was indicated by the frown such as gathers on a man's face when anxiously gazing through gloom. Though he did well, he missed one of the grandest points of the grand art

A Bloodless Combat

of swordsmanship—he did no fencing with his legs. His position was graceful, his hands at perfect poise and angle, but his knees were wooden, and I felt that presently I might take what he had taken at the start—the initiative.

It is no sin or sign of weakness to give ground in battle, and I gave it; while by the exclamations which broke from the officers, and were plainly meant as encouragement for Meltonne, one might have thought I was rapidly being beaten. The first trick the young man tried was an attempt to get his back to the fire; but as he worked to his left so did I to my right, and finally he desisted, as it became impossible for him to advance farther without stepping into the embers, and the heat was more than uncomfortable. From the first I had acted purely upon the defensive. While I claim (with all modesty) to be an accomplished swordsman, I make no pretence to be that impossible individual who can pick up a rapier and, with ease and an air of boredom or nonchalance, dispose of the strongest and bravest in a few passes and without the least danger to himself. These are but tales; such men do not exist. I had acquired skill through persistent hard work, and that which I knew I knew thoroughly. It was all the genius I possessed, and I needed it here. I had held my position for a moment, but finally backed from the fire as the heat became intolerable.

My adversary smiled as he saw me give way; the cries of his friends became redoubled, and perhaps they were justified, for to them it must have appeared that I had fallen back to avoid the furious attacks that kept my eye and sword busy, but which I always succeeded in parrying. As I drew from the range of the fierce heat an idea struck me. Meltonne had finally obtained the position he coveted—his back was towards the light and I had it full in my face. As yet he had not re-

The Strength of the Weak

treated a step; it was I who had given ground; but when I had him fairly betwixt me and the blaze I changed my tactics and stopped his advance. As I expected, he grew restless under the heat, for he now stood within six feet from the fire, and I was gradually forcing him backward. If he stepped aside to avoid retreating I leaped with him, caught his sword, and made him stand and parry. He no longer took the offensive, but confined himself to covering his body or making efforts to flank me, and inch by inch he was losing ground. If I could but hold my own I would punish him as he had probably never been punished.

It was soon plain to me, as it was to the onlookers, that the young officer was suffering severely, and I marked it with inward satisfaction. But, in truth, I was suffering severely myself, though in another way. The heat of the great fire must have been galling to my adversary's back and legs, and my holding him to broil over the furnace must have been anything but balm to his pride. As for me, my right arm was tiring, for I had been paddling many hours and had made no such violent and continuous effort as I was then making for weeks. If I did not wish to lose the respect which I felt was being held for me at that moment it behooved me to hurry matters to an end, and summoning my nerve I redoubled my efforts, hoping each minute that he would throw down his sword and protest at the proximity of the damning heat. Not a drop of blood had yet been shed, though I had slit Meltonne's right sleeve in an endeavour to wound his sword arm, and had the light been good I could have done it. With a sudden perception of what I was after, my adversary threw aside his chapeau, gave vent to an oath, suddenly shifted his sword from his right to his left hand, and set upon me to drive me off; but I countered on him with such violence that he retreated precipitate-

A Bloodless Combat

ly, and his right foot went into the hot embers behind him.

It would have been courtesy for me to have offered him a fair footing, but I did not. My blood was far too heated to admit of charity, nor do I yet think he deserved it. I saw my chance was at hand. Meltonne set his teeth as his foot felt the fire. There was a strong odour of burning leather and scorching woollen, and as a warning cry came from his friends he threw his glance aside for the fraction of a second, and then I won. With the instant relaxation of his vigilance, I caught his hilt on my point and whirled his sword from his hand. The look of consternation on his face was almost comical as he marked the flight of his weapon; but I'll warrant there was only rage showing a moment later when I made a feint to run him through (which I might easily have done), but changed my act to a formal salute, and, turning my back on him, walked towards Jessie's tent without taking notice of the others, over whom a sudden silence had fallen. I felt I had vindicated myself.

And it at once became evident that I had, and that the tide of favour, with the usual human fickleness, had turned to me; for ere I had covered half the distance the applause that broke out was generous in both quality and quantity, and it was evident that the little assemblage took no umbrage at my having openly ignored them.

I think the feeling that then possessed me was less of pride than of wonder as to how the girl would receive me, for I had little doubt that she had been witness to the entire combat. But I failed of the peculiar reception I looked for, for I had scarcely reached the tent when I saw the captain detach himself from the group who had gathered about my late antagonist and come towards me, and at the same moment and with a very lively satisfaction I saw the voyageur enter the clearing. He was laden with our arms and the packs which had

The Strength of the Weak

been left in the boat, and, as though perfectly familiar with the location of his sister's whereabouts, made straight for the tent that had become her quarters. I noticed, however, that he kept close to the edge of the forest, as though unwilling to come into the field of light made by the fire, but I dared neither to question him nor relate my experience, for both he and the captain arrived on about the same instant. The Frenchman looked askance at the woodsman as the latter dropped his burden and squatted, Indian fashion, beside the baggage, like a man too stupid or too familiar with his surroundings to care for aught but the pipe which he sucked.

"My servant, m'sieur," I said to the officer, in answer to his wondering gaze.

"I presume so. It was partly to see to your comfort that I came." Here he became the type of personified graciousness, and held out his hand to me as he continued.

"M'sieur le seigneur, I have to beg your pardon for what has happened, for in a measure it was my fault. Frankly, your coming, your being on the river at the hour you were, and your appearance, your dress, made me suspicious as to your real rank. I feared you were masquerading. But a man who can handle a rapier and carry himself as you have done is a gentleman, despite appearances. By St. Louis! I thought you put on the dress and air of a grand seigneur for the purpose of deceiving us.* I tested you, m'sieur; it was my duty. I trust you will forgive us our apparent rudeness."

* At the time of the French and Indian War many of the Canadian seigneurs were abject in their poverty. The idea of founding an aristocracy in the wilderness by granting the title of "seigneur" to landed proprietors utterly failed of its purpose. The title lost its dignity because of the poverty of those who bore it.

A Bloodless Combat

I was a trifle mollified by this, for it was an apology, pure and simple, but I hardly thought that Lieutenant Meltonne would indorse it, and expressed my doubts to the captain. He laughed quietly. "Lieutenant Meltonne is deeply chagrined, no doubt," he returned; "more so, perhaps, because he expected to make short work of you. He is somewhat scorched about the calves, but he will recover his temper with a new skin. However, you need not fear further insults from him; you have given him a lesson in fencing that will stand him in good stead. It was the best piece of sword play I ever saw."

"It matters little," I returned, with no great unbending; "since we move on early in the morning, the lieutenant will not be reminded of his mishap by the sight of me."

"You are over modest as to your ability, m'sieur," answered the captain, "and you will not think of moving to-morrow; it would be dangerous. The barbarians are in force above us, and, though St. Pierre governs with a strong hand, he cannot hold them in check in every instance. You are safe here. We move in two days, and you will travel faster in the end. I would not have you expose your sister to such a positive danger, and if Meltonne does not behave himself he will have to deal with me. M'sieur, consider yourself and party as our guests."

There was no denying the man's sincerity, but it was policy for me to protest, and I did so; but I had no sooner expressed myself by doubting the propriety of remaining, when the voyageur growled out:

"If m'sieur le seigneur goes to-morrow he goes without me. I knew not of the red-skins above. Would I die? Not so. I wait. Besides, the boat needs mending."

He said this without a turn of his head or in any

The Strength of the Weak

way, save by giving me my title, showing me the least respect. He was acting the dullard, the French habitant, to perfection. It was plain he had a motive for delay, but what I did not know. The boat was in perfect shape, and I knew his statement was but subterfuge. The captain scowled at him.

"Faith, he's a surly devil, and needs the scabbard across his shoulders for his lack of grace! But the villain has sense. You will tarry with us. I am about to send the runner back, and with him a message to the count to the effect that your sister and yourself are my guests."

Had he struck me in the face I would have been no more overcome. I gave a gasp that almost betrayed my great concern, and then thanked God for the darkness that veiled my emotion. I knew the voyageur had heard this as plainly as myself, and hesitated a moment for some sign from him. There came none, save a quick turn of his head as he looked at me, and then fell back into his dogged expression, though I could see but little more of him than the whites of his eyes, for he had cast himself down in the shadow of the tent. I was on fire to get a word with him, but there stood the captain smilingly awaiting my answer, though he appeared more interested in the girl, who stood by us in the opened flap of the tent, than in aught else. And a mighty attractive picture she made in the glow of the distant fire. The weakened light brought out all the beauty of her features, giving a rich bronze to her handsome face, putting a fine sparkle in her dark eye, and at the same time mellowing the stains and weather-beaten appearance of her close-fitting garments. She might have stood for the goddess of the forest. She paid no attention to her open admirer, her gaze being fixed on the group near the great tree, and ere I answered the captain I looked to see what was interesting

A Bloodless Combat

her. It appeared to be nothing. A soldier and an Indian had approached the officers at the fire, though I could see little of them save their black outlines; but in a moment the soldier left the group and walked towards us. As he saluted he addressed the Frenchman.

"I am directed to inform the captain that the runner wishes to return. Has the captain orders for him?"

The officer waved the man away. "I will see to it," he said. Then turning to me: "It is the runner who bore orders to the camps along the river, ours among them. He is now going back, and, as I have said, I will send a message with him. I shall tell the count that you travel in our company."

"I cannot refuse your hospitality and protection with grace," I returned, following the cue Spaulding had given.

"That is well," he replied; "and I will add a word from yourself. What shall it be?"

I was as little prepared for this as I had been for his statement that he would send word of our coming to De Mantel, but I knew that something must be said. I would have given much to have been able to read the voyageur's mind at that moment, but he gave no sign, nor, by interrupting, helped me out of the dilemma. His attitude and silence spoke no language that I could understand, and, as I was past invention, I let the truth serve me. With a forced laugh, I said:

"Tell the count that when we meet I will take the satisfaction he once offered me; that he has won too much for me to abandon him. Tell him also that Felix has a proxy; he will understand. You do not know, m'sieur captain, that Felix was once the count's body-servant."

The Strength of the Weak

"Ah!" said the captain, catching my laugh. "His servant, indeed. A lusty villain."

"Aye, but he is still fond of his old master," I said, carelessly. "I think we all wish to see the count. He was my guest for a week, and I assure you he made my house lively the while."

"I can well believe it—if he was as I saw him last. *Mon Dieu!* But one must make life enjoyable somehow while in this cursed country. You must fight for the sake of sensation. Is that why you fight well?"

"We fight our enemies only, m'sieur."

"I thank God I am no enemy of yours, then. Well, there is my tent, *Seigneur de Mantel. Au revoir.*"

He left us, much to my relief, and barely had he gone beyond earshot when the voyageur said:

"Throw yourself down, lad, I have something to say. Jessie, get ye into the shade o' the tent."

I obeyed him at once, and reclined carelessly on the ground near him, while the girl moved back.

"I am glad to know ye have a cool head on yer shoulders," he began, by way of compliment. "I think they have no suspicions o' us. I watched ye battle with yon jackanapes while I lay at the edge of the woods, an' now I know that Felix was right. I ha' been laughin' at your sword throughout the journey, but I see ye were justified in strappin' the thing on to ye. Ye can well take care o' yerself. I hope ye are as handy with a rifle, for betwixt us I may ask ye to use it soon enough."

"Ah!" said I, without moving. "In what way?"

He hesitated a moment, and I noticed how keenly his eye turned towards the fire as he shifted himself forward to look at the group gathered near it.

"Lad," he said quietly, "yonder runner is the Ab-nakis."

Despite my determination to control myself, I gave

A Bloodless Combat

a violent start at this, and found a sudden interest in the distant company. The Indian stood as straight as an arrow by the side of the captain, who was sitting on the ground writing on a paper spread over his knee. I could make nothing of his features, but I saw he was stripped for action from his moccasined feet to his scalp-lock, with its single eagle-feather thrust through the braided hair. The voyageur continued.

"He came in a canoe, having been stopped by the same guard that netted us. Had we continued on we might ha' met him. God has been good to us. He did not see me, for I was lying alongside the boat. Do ye know, lad, I think he found we had not passed the point at Chambly, an' he is tryin' back, as I said he would."

This was mighty interesting matter to me. It was right enough to thank God that we were still alive, but it appeared to me that we were hedged by circumstances that were bound to overthrow us in the end. With De Mantel looming ahead and the Abnakis at hand, I thought our case bad enough. From the red-skin I had little to fear for myself, for I doubt that he would have known me as his enemy, never having seen me but once, and probably having no idea that I had been the one to grapple with him in the dark. But I did fear for the voyageur, and feared more for the girl, if the woodsman's presence was suspected.

"He does not dream we are so near," I said, making a bid for reassurance.

"I'm not so sure o' that, lad," returned the voyageur, in a low voice. "He is an Injun, an' there be other Injuns in camp, an' never fear but they all know of the strangers who have arrived. I could pot him from here, an' would, only 'twould ruin us all. I hope to the Lord he takes yon paper to the count, as ye calls him, but I don't think it."

"Don't think it! Why, he's off with it now!" I ex-

The Strength of the Weak

claimed, as I saw the officer hand the runner a paper which the Indian tucked into his breech-clout.

"I fancy he will not go far," returned Spaulding. "If I lose not my guess, he only wishes to be free o' this camp that he may watch our goin'. We are safe while we remain, *unless* we stray into the woods too far; an' I would have both ye an' Jessie stay on yer guard, an' don't worry for me should I disappear for a time to-morrow. If I can bring him down I'll do it in cold blood."

He ceased for a moment, and we both watched the red-skin as he glided away with his peculiar snakelike motion, a motion I recognised at once. Then the voyageur continued.

"Now, there be one of two things we can do: either sneak off this night, steal a canoe, and risk this devil and all other things that threaten, or travel in safety and comfort by water with the guard about us. When we get to the proper point we can leave them, or, if worse comes to worse, ye might appeal to Dieskau himself."

"How far is it to La Chevelure?" I asked softly.

"Seventy miles an' upward, as the crow flies. Five days by paddle; three days by paddle an' sail if there be a fair wind."

It did not take a deal of thinking on my part to enable me to pass an opinion. The facts as put to me, together with my imagination, made me draw a sudden conclusion. I pictured the girl trudging through the forest, for if we fled that night we would be obliged to take to the woods within a few miles because of the Richelieu rapids. We could not transport a canoe in secret; we would have to abandon the river. I fancied the girl dragged along weary, and perhaps sick, while our ears would be set for the whoop of the fiend who would be likely to trail us. I turned to the voyageur.

A Bloodless Combat

“ I am for casting our lot with this company. If we can rid ourselves of them at the lower end of Champlain it will save us many a weary footstep to stay the while with them.”

“ Right, lad,” was all he vouchsafed on the subject, and he fell to sucking his pipe in earnest.

CHAPTER XXVII

L'ANGUILLE

It was little I slept that night. The weather was fine, but the air had a creeping coolness that strengthened towards midnight. I lay at the door of the captain's tent and watched the play of the fire on the giant tree. The great corrugations of its bark, folds as thick as a man's arm, stood out in the strong light; but as the eye travelled upward the rough surface seemed to smooth in the shadow, until finally the massive column lost the play of the flames and shot up into the black space above, grand and mysterious. I have always held an unusual respect, aye, a love, for trees. In my youth I gave them attributes I knew they did not possess—intelligence, watchfulness, consciousness of pain and pleasure, and almost a soul. I have never laid an axe to one without a mental apology. The giant hemlock has gone. Forty years later I sought it, and found its stump, its smooth-sawn top testifying to the rapacity of the timber hunter. This night its towering height and far-reaching arms seemed a protection—a sleepless sentinel—and somehow, in a childish fashion, I gathered comfort from it.

The passage of the French army had driven from its track most of the wild beasts of the wilderness; but in the distance I heard the cry of a panther, a cry so like that of a child in distress, a wail so human that the animal has beguiled the ignorant and unsuspecting to death, and that, too, more than once. The owls hooted, the

L'Anguille

night wind whispered through the hemlock needles far above me, the captain snored at my side, and once in a while I heard the footsteps of the guard as he passed on his round. I could not sleep. Finally, I crept out into the opening. I could see the dark forms of the Indians about the dying fire. The sentinel at the wood's edge stood still and watched me as I made my way towards Jessie's tent, in front of which I had seen the voyageur stretch himself to pass the night. As I drew near I found the spot recently occupied by the woodsman vacant. The voyageur had gone. I was surprised, but not alarmed. I walked over to the watching sentinel, who promptly brought up his musket as I approached him.

"Have you seen my servant?" I asked.

"No, m'sieur."

"What is the hour?"

"Past two. M'sieur is restless."

"Yes. May I pass the lines?"

"No, m'sieur."

I had no great desire to do so. I had thought of going to the boats, but even before I was refused I saw the undertaking would be both difficult and useless in the dark, and might be dangerous as well, for I called to mind the injunction of the voyageur about straying in the woods. I did not return to the captain's tent, but went and sat myself at the foot of the hemlock, with my back against its immense bole. I drowsed, and finally slept, for when I next opened my eyes it was light, the ghastly light that comes before the sun. I could see the sentinel I had spoken to stalking up and down like an uneasy spirit, the polished steel of his musket-barrel gleaming white in the half-light. The red-skins still lay by the fire, which had been replenished.

I was in the act of rubbing my eyes and stretching my cramped limbs when I heard the noise of a scuffle

The Strength of the Weak

and a hoarse cry from my left. A shot followed, and from the rear of the tents an Indian leaped into the clearing, and by his sinuous motion I at once recognised the Abnakis, L'Anguille. Bent almost double he sped across the opening, his rifle at trail, a thin line of smoke following from its muzzle. Ere he had reached the centre of the camp the sentinel opposite me brought up his musket and fired at the flying figure. The ball missed its mark (which was no great wonder) and buried itself in the tree a foot over my head. The shot did not deter the fleeing Indian, however, for he continued across the opening until he reached the edge of the forest. There he stopped, and, brandishing his rifle above his head, let out a whoop of triumph that rang through the woods, and at the same moment Spaulding burst from behind the tents. The savage stood for a brief instant like one surprised, then drawing his tomahawk from his belt, hurled it at his enemy, and, turning, fled into the cover of the forest. The voyageur dodged the vicious little axe and halted abruptly, knowing the uselessness of following. It was all done in less than thirty seconds.

The shots and shout raised the camp at once, though when the matter was explained it seemed to rouse but slight interest, and this was largely due to the colour the voyageur gave the story. The few Indians in camp were at first excited at the supposed attack that had been made on one of their race, for, albeit those present were of the tribe of Micmiacs, they belonged to the same country as the Abnakis, and were of the same great family—that is, of the Algonquin. The captain demanded an explanation, which the woodsman gave readily enough; but I knew there was something beyond his recital, for he treated the matter as though he were terribly angry, and showed such uncouth ferocity against the escaped red-skin that I both wondered and admired his powers of acting. He was the coarse, angry, and incoherent

L'Anguille

habitant from his head to his heels. When sifted of verbiage and expletive, his tale was that he had recognised the runner the night before. The Abnakis had been a notorious trap-thief, though he did not confine himself to traps alone. But lately he had stolen the woodsman's rifle, an act which in those days started a never-dying feud. He said that his master had commanded him to guard mademoiselle while she slept, and he had heard a noise in the rear of mademoiselle's tent, and had discovered the runner in the act of cutting a slit in the canvas, presumably to get at the packs that had been left within. He had at once grappled with the thief, who had shot at him while in a hand-to-hand encounter; but the only result was the blowing away and burning of a part of the voyageur's shirt, leaving him uninjured, save for a blister caused by the blast of flame. Thinking he had killed his enemy, the Abnakis had fled, stopping an instant to utter his cry of triumph when he was about safe from pursuit. The narrative was attested by two facts—the slit in the rear of the maiden's tent and the mutilated shirt of the speaker. It was then for me to be indignant at the laxity which permitted such an attack on my sister's tent, but I did not protest too forcibly or too long, for privately Spaulding told me to let the matter drop, as it was he himself who had cut the tent in order to make good his story. He further informed me that he had lain in wait for the red-skin, but the failure of his priming had turned the tables, and he had come near being bested.

"We need have no more to fear of him at present," he concluded, "only this ye may be sure of: he will fill the count with news of our whereabouts, an' 'tis like that both devils will be on the watch for our coming. Were it not for Jessie I would take to the woods to-day."

And more's the pity that we did not go then, as we might have done, even had we left our packs behind.

The Strength of the Weak

But there was no indication of trouble in store during the next three days. We lived well, and the respect shown us was flawless, though I never wandered far from camp without a soldier turning up and ordering me within bounds on the plea of danger. I could not see how it was more dangerous for me than for others, but did not condescend to dispute the order. I was free to go to the river, but found our bateau had been drawn high and dry, and it would have taken three men to move it. Otherwise our personal treatment was all that could have been desired. Even Meltonne recovered his good-humour, or as much of it as he ever seemed to possess, and finally he begged me to show him a point or two with the rapier. I did not find him a bright pupil, and discovered that he had much to unlearn, a matter far more difficult than obtaining knowledge. I even taught him the rudiments of the trick by which I had disarmed him, and he was fairly gracious for my trouble. But for all that he appeared respectful enough, and talked freely of Dessonier and the losses he had suffered at the count's hands, he never expressed dislike for my enemy, and I fancied he resented my presence—that his late defeat at my hands still rankled in him. He and the captain were much together, and, as though I had a guilty conscience, I thought they were forever talking of me. They all considered me wealthy—a large land-owner—and I allowed them to deceive themselves, for humanity was then, much as it is now, dazzled by gold—wealth and welcome still go hand in hand. It would never have been wise to let them know my financial status; and if their self-deception insured us better treatment, it was not for me to disabuse their minds.

I saw little of the voyageur during the ensuing three days. At no time and in no place was the line betwixt master and servant drawn more sharply than then and there in the woods, and I could not be seen hobnobbing

L'Anguille

with a common guide. Neither would it have been advisable to pay too much attention to my supposed sister, though at meals we were together, and could speak our thoughts freely. I mean that we might have communicated our thoughts freely, for we were unwatched and unmolested; but there seemed to have grown a slight restraint on her part, which became somewhat marked when I jokingly referred to our fictitious relation as brother and sister. She would allow me to kiss her hand in a brotherly fashion when we parted at night and there were witnesses about; but if we were alone she would have none of it, saying, in effect, that, though it might be well enough to try and deceive others, it was folly to attempt to deceive ourselves. It was through her that the voyageur and I communicated, for he had access to her at all times. As for me, I would have passed all my hours with her had I not seen the danger incurred, and on the whole I think that the Chevalier Péan (for such was the captain's name and title) saw more of her than did I, as he was forever hanging about the door of her tent, unless it happened to be drawn close or he was engaged at cards or his meals. I fairly think I might have been jealous of the captain had it not been for the frank way in which she spoke of his attentions, telling me with a laugh that it was evident she had made a conquest, and becoming sober at once when I told her that the captain was undoubtedly a good fellow, of high rank, and probably rich. Whatever the difference between us, there certainly was not the old and easy interchange of thought, the familiar footing, and perfect freedom that had obtained while we were upon the island. I wished we were back there, or at least out of this camp. I fancy she understood my motive for leaving her so much alone, but I dared offer no explanation, for fear of being misinterpreted; as it was, my conduct savoured more of brotherly neglect than

The Strength of the Weak

of brotherly affection, though I exacted every due from others. My life was one of deceit at this time. With the officers I was compelled to play the part of a *bon camarade*. Though I had never gambled before, I did so now; but fortunately the stakes were small, else I would have been obliged to expose my poverty. It so happened that my hosts were anything but flush of cash, and the play would be for bits of paper known as *ordonnances*, or promissory notes of from one franc to one hundred. *Lanctreloo*, since shortened to "loo," was the game we played, sitting for hours at a time on the ground under the great tree, while all about us the birds sang, the leaves rustled, and the sun-spots danced over the carpet of brown needles. As I knew nothing about the game, I won with such ease and regularity (as primary pupils of the devil always seem to do) that I increased the respect of the others for me even if I did not strengthen their love.

Nothing marred the calm of the three days we remained in this camp. It is to be presumed that the river was watched according to orders, but no more prisoners were brought in, though many boats passed during the day. Once I saw an entire regiment, headed by a band of music, go by in bateaux. Banners were flying, steel glistening, and the water dancing with the reflection of gorgeous colours. The strains from the band filled the woodland, the forest on the opposite shore reflecting back the blare of trumpets and rattle of drums, the whole effect being wonderfully entrancing. It made a romance of war. Here was the flower of French infantry bound for Isle aux Noix, or La Chevelure, or Fort Carillon, as Ticonderoga was then called, and the rear of the brilliant flotilla was brought up with a cloud of canoes filled with red-skins, painted hideously, and the war-whoop was on the end of every tongue.

CHAPTER XXVIII

LA CHEVELURE

WE broke camp early the next morning and followed them. It had become a problem with me as to whether we would be allowed to retain our own bateau, but, much to my relief, we were, and two soldiers were placed therein to help paddle. We had too much company, I thought, for with more or less excuse, and often with no excuse at all, our boat would be boarded by one of the sextette, ostensibly to ask questions of the voyageur as to the river, the distances and the like, but, to my mind, for a chat with the girl whose beauty was more than merely admired. As for the captain, his boat was never more than easy speaking distance from us.

We floated in comfort, and even in luxury, for I hardly raised my hand to do a thing until we reached the rapids of the Richelieu. Then came the carry and drag. Two days more found us among the broken islands at the foot of Lake Champlain, and we passed Isle aux Noix without a stop, though the white barracks and officers' houses among the trees and the great waving banner of France were eyed anxiously and sorrowfully by all save the maiden, the voyageur, and myself. By this we were travelling in company with a number of other bateaux, and not a few Indians, having overtaken others or been overhauled ourselves. No one paid us particular attention, we probably being looked upon as camp followers, of which there were many.

The Strength of the Weak

The weather was golden and the scenery almost enough to lull anxiety, but now the devil of more active worry took possession of me and would not down. I eyed the blue and distant hills with longing. The billowy forests beckoned me to their protection. I recognised the fact that every foot we made by boat was a tremendous saving in both time and exertion, but it was an ease that suggested danger. Neither by day nor night did I have a chance for free conversation with Spaulding, who always sat crouched in the bow, with eyes ahead and apparently no thought for aught else than the pipe he was forever sucking. He never forgot himself. His huddled figure gave no hint of the athlete, nor did his sleepy eye and tobacco-stained lips indicate anything more than the sluggish, thick-brained Canadian habitant. The two soldiers, who had been told off as paddlers, and the constant visitors, to say nothing of the captain's ever-hovering bateau, made anything like confidences between the voyageur and myself impossible while we were afloat. Somehow I felt that we were being spied upon, and the consequent fear was strengthened, though not made certain, when I proposed hastening ahead. This would have been no difficult matter, for we were but lightly burdened as compared to the other boats, and the soldiers worked leisurely; but the captain would not hear of it, saying that now he felt responsible for our safety. I tried to make myself think it was his regard for the girl that made him insist on our remaining, and now, in the face of events, I think that was his only reason. The gist of all I got from the voyageur, through Jessie, was to the effect that so long as things went smoothly to let them alone; that matters were progressing better than he had hoped, and that when he saw the time was ripe for running he would let me know.

This gave me some confidence and our surroundings

La Chevelure

gave me more. It was hard to believe that under such soft skies, compassed by such beauty and wafted by such sweet winds, there could be aught but good fellowship and protection among God's creatures. Peace seemed to brood over the lovely lake, and yet war was suggested on every hand. The face of the waters was dotted with white sails (for now the wind was fair, and we hurried along under canvas), but beneath each milky speck, be it far or near, there were the sword and musket, emblems of violence and hate. Heaven knows I had been treated in a manner to foster the spirit of hatred, but somehow it fell from me. I no longer thought of vengeance on De Mantel, and such was the influence of love that hate ceased to exist. I only asked that I might go my way in peace.

But I was not to go my way in peace. The farther we got down the lake, the narrower it became and the slower we moved, the latter owing to the accumulation of craft wending southward. We had fallen into the thick of it, it seemed, and it looked as though New France was pouring out enough of her population to overrun the frontier and make the matter of a successful move on the part of the English an impossibility.

I confess to a shiver of apprehension when the encampment of La Chevelure broke on our view. We saw it from afar, but the single white speck soon resolved itself into hundreds of cone-shaped tents, each one set up with little or no relation to its neighbours, or to anything else that I could see. The great log fortifications looked formidable, and the buildings, plain though they were, appeared elaborate after our long experience of the wilderness. The landing was blocked with craft, and the shore for a distance above and below lined with them, canoes and bateaux being mixed indiscriminately. The great military store-house was in the centre of a hubbub of confusion, and, though I

The Strength of the Weak

had no knowledge of the art of war and little taste for the science, I saw what a powerful blow could be here struck by the English. That the little army under William Johnson had La Chevelure for its objective point I had heard from Péan, but by the confusion and lack of discipline which seemed to reign it did not appear that the French had any great fear of attack. Even the fort had a number of guns unmounted, the majority of the buildings within the works were used as officers' houses, while the outworks were of the weakest character. I came to the conclusion that Captain Péan was right. Dieskau was about to push the French frontier farther south and would not await attack. It was evident that preparations were being made for some enterprise, as there appeared to be a vast deal of activity and a constant coming and going of boats; while, even before we landed, I could see the road along the hillside, which road I guessed ran to Fort Carillon, was alive with men bound for the grand rendezvous.

For all the confusion, there must have been an efficient quarter-master, for we were at once provided with shelter, being sent to a log-house in which temporarily resided a major and his wife who would be off for Carillon that evening. The captain found himself with his regiment at last, and offered to share his quarters with me; but when I found the house lay among those within the walls of the fort and at a distance from the shore, I excused myself, while I thanked him for his kindnesses and asked him to call on us, an invitation he promptly accepted.

It was at this time that I managed to get my first free talk with the voyageur. We had settled Jessie and passed down the road to be out of hearing of others, going south until turned back by the sentinel. Then we went to the water's edge, and, sheltered from the sun,

La Chevelure

though in plain sight of the sentry, sat down and appeared to be admiring the lake and its opposite shore.

Spaulding had been silent during the walk, keeping a step or two behind me, as became a servant ; but when we finally settled down he said, with a touch of impatience :

“ Well, lad, the pace is getting a trifle too hot to hold. We must get from this. We have saved our legs for more miles than I had hoped for, but now ye must get ready to foot it. List to that ! ”

He broke off and inclined his ear towards the lake.

“ I hear nothing,” I said after listening intently.

“ Music,” he returned, laconically.

And surely enough, for though it was some minutes ere I could catch it, at length there was borne to me the strains of an approaching band, sounding exquisitely beautiful as the melody drifted over the water. Presently a barge and two bateaux swept along the shore, and, from the uniforms as well as the band, I knew some one of importance was about arriving at La Chevelure.

“ They be from the new post,” said Spaulding, as the flotilla came abreast of us.

“ Carillon ? ” I asked.

“ Aye. Ticonderoga is its red-skin name. It lies ten miles south. I wish we were at the other side of it.” He shook his shoulders impatiently. “ We are miles on miles from Albany, lad ; an’ farther yet from Dummerston, which is as near a home as I have. Now, let us look matters fairly in the face. Betwixt here an’ Albany the land is full o’ men strivin’ for each others’ lives. God, what a condition for humans when the good Book is plain readin’ an’ tells us to love one another ! It is a case too thick for my poor head to know a man will kill his fellow for a few feet or even miles o’ land that the Almighty gave to all. But let that rest the while ; they do it, an’ ’twill be centuries ere they get

The Strength of the Weak

sense enough to see their own interests an' quit. Never mind. The red-skins are thick below, an' will be thicker, an' Iroquois or Algonquin, there is no trusting them when chance is ripe. An' it is through this league on league o' sin an' danger that we have got to drag the poor lass, who, for all her bravery, is yet but a woman. We might lie by and let the danger pass us instead of forever runnin' ahead or into it."

I had no liking for his reference to the treachery of the savages, nor did I catch his meaning, and told him so.

"I don't mean to lie by here, my son; 'tis the most dangerous spot, barrin' your own house, I have yet been in. There is the count at Carillon probably, and the Abnakis may be among the cloud o' red-skins about. Who knows? An' 'tis like that one or both gets scent of us. No, I mean this. Away below here, say ten or fifteen miles from the head o' Saint Sacrement, an' on the shore o' the New Hampshire Grants, Felix an' I have a house—ah! worse fortune, I have it alone now. 'Tis on the hill known as Elephant's Head—on the forehead, as it were—with a great breadth of level forest in its rear an' next to nothing in front; for 'tis built on a shelf, like, an' I think where it faces the lake the cliff falls away almost sheer for threescore feet. Ye could never find it by description, nor do I think many white men were ever on it; for the country in the rear is the Drowned Lands ye may have heard of, while going from Saint Sacrement it is a hard climb through a narrow gorge. Felix an' I were younger when we took up this section, but the land is fat an' the place a paradise if ye have an eye for hill an' dale, land an' water. Together we built the house as it is, that it might be both a shelter an' a refuge in a time o' trouble, though we looked for naught but savages to ever molest us. So rich is the soil, my son, that the first season we ploughed

La Chevelure

with an axe, an' raised a crop o' corn by dropping seed in the cleft made by the blade. Lad, 'tis a spot where one can worship God an' learn to love those that hate him."

He seemed to be talking to himself, and the softness of the man lay with the plainness of the down on a peach, and as easily brushed away, perchance. His eyes had a far-off look as he uttered the last words, and for a moment I remained silent, feeling rather than seeing the sweetness and charity of his better nature. Then I asked :

"And when was this?"

He did not answer directly, but spoke as though taking up the thread of his speech where he had laid it down.

"I thought, my son, that I would like to go there and lie by awhile—Jessie an' I—an' ye, too, if ye list, though perhaps ye are fain to get on to William Johnson. We left the house, did Felix an' I, to take home pelt an' make a visit. Well, God help me, lad, I found my father dead when I got to Dummerston, an' the lass gone, an' the world a great blank, save for a red spot in it that was of the colour o' blood, an' meant vengeance, so I know by that it must be more than five years since I have seen the place."

I was mightily interested in this description, as well as moved by the way he had spoken, but I had no relish for even his slight reference to the possibility of my leaving him; it gave me a lost, homesick feeling. He stood up and shook himself as if he would be rid of his thoughts, but said nothing as he glowered at the distant camp. The last strains of the band were dying in the air, for the boats had reached the landing. Suddenly he turned to me, and, bringing his hand down with its usual resounding whack as he smote his thigh, he said bitterly :

The Strength of the Weak

“Mighty king, but is it not strange that matters are at a pass that compels an innocent maid to flee from her fellows an’ be willing to house with the beasts o’ the wilderness? What does it mean?”

I made no answer to this question, which has bothered the sages. I was thinking with delight of the possibility of escaping to such a haven of rest and safety as he had described, nor did I attempt to disguise the fact that half the beauty of the picture I painted lay in the presence there of Jessie Spaulding. It was somewhat evident that the woodsman, for all his sharpness of eye and ear, was totally blind to the fact that for his sister I held aught but the commonest feelings of friendship, and under the circumstance of her air of indifference towards me I did not think it advisable to make a confidant of him. I had been through enough hardship and worry to justify a desire for rest, and in the isolation of the place described by the voyageur safety seemed assured. But Spaulding broke my train of thought.

“You will stick to us yet awhile?”

“I never dreamed of aught else,” I answered.

“I thought as much. Then I shall make a shift to get off this night. It should be no great trouble to fetch into the woods on the other side of the lake, an’ we even might risk passing Carillon, and get into South Bay, where our way would be clear. I have an idea that in this muss we might take a canoe, and let luck and the darkness carry us through.”

“It will be broad moonlight,” I urged.

“Let it. It will be more help to us than to those who may follow.”

I saw nothing against the scheme, and our situation warranted taking large chances. I noticed, too, that there was no guard over the boats, and it seemed an easy matter to step into our own, and, in the confusion,

La Chevelure

push off. We might even abandon something in the way of provisions, and I was becoming elated with the idea of our approach to freedom once more, when there came the noise of some one breaking through the bushes behind us, and I turned to see a soldier, a man who usually acted as a semi-body-servant to Péan. He raised his hand in salute as he spied me.

“M’sieur le Seigneur de Mantel?”

“Yes.”

“I have been long in searching. M’sieur le Capitaine le Chevalier Péan wishes to see m’sieur.”

“Indeed! Where is he?”

“At his quarters. I am directed to guide m’sieur.”

This was an unusual summons under the circumstances. It first occurred to me that I was wished to fill out a hand at cards, as I had many times been requested to do, but in the face of our recent arrival it struck me as improbable. Then it came to me that perhaps something had befallen the girl, and as her brother, I had been sent for at once. I put the inquiry to the soldier.

“I have not seen mademoiselle. I believe she is well. It is the seigneur who has a visitor waiting.”

“A visitor! Who?” I asked, with sudden apprehension.

“Yes, m’sieur, an old friend who has but just arrived with the Baron Dieskau—the Count de Lune.”

I was petrified. Coming atop of my golden dream, it was thrice paralyzing. I must have looked stupid, indeed, as I turned to the voyageur, for I was as dumb-founded as though I had suddenly discovered a ball and chain tied to my leg. In the interval of silence which fell, and during which I shifted my back to the soldier, the woodsman had settled into the character of the surly habitant again, though I marked the sudden pallor which showed through the rich bronze of his cheek. His

The Strength of the Weak

teeth were clinched. He gave me a scowling glance, and then spoke, as though his words were a continuation of what he had been saying.

"M'sieur le seigneur, you would make an excuse to go, but you will not leave me in this fashion. You have called me a blockhead once too often. I am no blockhead. I now wish my discharge and the little roll of paper I gave you for safe-keeping."

He flung his rifle into the hollow of his arm, and growled out a peasant's oath as he held forth his hand.

Struck dumb as I had been by the soldier's words, I was not so stunned but that I penetrated Spaulding's meaning, and, even through the tumult of feelings that beset me, admired his self-control and his ability to act a part so readily. His quickness of wit met with a proper response, however. I was not so lost as to be unable to follow his lead. His attitude was a plain enough warning, and so, with as much dignity as my rapidly beating heart would allow, I answered:

"You are an ungrateful dog, Felix. Go your way. I have no more to say to you." And thrusting my hand into my bosom, I handed the woodsman the packet of papers the possession of which had well-nigh been fatal to me. Whatever might be the result of my coming interview, they were safe from De Mantel, even though he did his worst.

CHAPTER XXIX

A FRIEND IN NEED

ALBEIT I walked so rapidly that I put the soldier to his best paces to keep near me, I felt like a man going to the scaffold. There were two matters hurrying me: first, that I might make the inevitable plunge; second, to help the girl, who, for aught I knew, was suffering from the visit of the count and already in his power. She would be like a sparrow in the clutch of a hawk, and I felt it had been wrong for us to have left her at all. I could fairly reckon that Spaulding would avenge any ill treatment towards his sister, but that would not lessen her present agony, and it was only I who could force myself into her presence in virtue of our pretended relation. Unfortunately, I was unarmed, having left my rapier at our quarters, but trusted to luck that arms would not be required, and, for that matter, really had no fear of coming violence.

On reaching the fort, the building to which I bent my steps was one of the newest, though by no means the largest, within the inclosure. Like the rest, it had been constructed of logs. It was evidently intended for little more than temporary shelter or quarters for an officer, and was so divided as to form two rooms, one being intended for a bed-chamber, the other as both general room and kitchen, for the great fire-place was furnished with crane-gearing, in a state of neglect, though a small fire burned upon the hearth when I entered the room. There was but one window to this

The Strength of the Weak

apartment, and the interior was cool and pleasant after the glare and heat of the outer air, but the change from the broad light to shadow made objects within hardly discernible for a moment or two.

The door being opened, I entered without ceremony, and, though I could see but indistinctly, I was perfectly conscious that my old enemy sat in a heavy chair near the table ; while seated upon the table itself, with his legs swinging in careless ease, was the Chevalier Péan, attired in a full-dress uniform, a marvel of gold lace and glitter from the tip of his sword's scabbard to the plumes of the chapeau on his handsome head. The two were talking, and both looked up as my shadow broke the strip of sunlight that fell through the door.

As I came slowly forward the chevalier slipped from his perch and advanced to me, holding out his hand, his face all smiles. I was astonished at his appearance and expression, and yet more so at his words.

“ My dear seigneur, I took the liberty of sending for you, and if you are as happy to see the count as he is anxious to meet you again, you will thank me.” He laughed as he saw my eye play over him in wonder, and concluded : “ We missed the inspection at Isle aux Noix, but overtook it here. The baron is making the rounds of La Chevelure, but you need not fear him—you still stand as my guest, m’sieur.”

His courtesy was extreme, and for the life of me I was unable to discern any irony in all this ; but that his congratulation was a farce, that his smile was but the prelude to a frown, I had no doubt. I had learned to like the man within the past few days, his manner to me having become more kind and open, and his demeanour to my supposed sister uniformly deferential. I had looked on him as one to whom I might appeal if worst came to worst, but this seeming mock politeness was bewildering. It was slightly more bewildering, but none

A Friend in Need

the less convincing, when the count (for a count he now undoubtedly was) followed the lead of the chevalier, arose to his feet, and advanced with a smile as forced as the other's appeared free. I saw his face then for the first time. His beard had been shortened, he was thinner, and his countenance more openly evil, I thought. He was dressed in the full uniform of his rank, and his sword clanked significantly as he moved across the floor. The villain actually held out his hand to me as he said:

"M'sieur Chatsworth, you have told the chevalier that you seek revenge for my winnings. I had hoped there was to be a truce between us. Should enmity always exist? I trust you and your sister have had a pleasant journey."

There was the very devil in the grin he bore and the way his words came through his set jaws, and I alone received the benefit of his expression, as his back was towards Péan. Was it for this I had quaked as I walked? Had I let the dread of this man hang over me for days, taking the light from my life? For some reason my fear of him suddenly vanished. It was not because I was in a degree safer, but perhaps because the rancour within me which had lain dormant beneath the soft sentiment of love leaped to the surface, and the sudden hatred I felt for the man was an unholy thing. It overcame all fear of him. So great was it that I could have run him through or shot him then and there had I been armed with sword or pistol. I stood in mute wonderment at this piece of hypocrisy, and then an inspiration seized me. I smiled in return—a ghastly grin, in all probability—and, ignoring his hand, summoned all my ability to make my face lie as sweetly as my enemy's. I think I did it fairly successfully, but my cheeks were tingling with excitement as I returned:

"M'sieur Armand de Mantel has shown the greatest

The Strength of the Weak

consideration in asking for me. He knows how I appreciate his friendship, which has been of infinite value in our journey. I have to thank him again for the assistance given by his pass. As for my sister, m'sieur, she enjoyed the journey, and to be frank, m'sieur, she enjoyed it much more for your absence. She complains that you are too boisterous, and, to be more brutally frank, m'sieur, she openly questions your right to your title. You see how unreasonable she is."

His face turned dark with rage, but I noticed he still kept his back towards the chevalier as he bit his lips and said mildly, though the appearance of his eyes belied his tones:

"M'sieur Chatsworth's spirit of unforgiveness for his losses is beyond bounds. It makes him forget that he at least knows my title."

"As M'sieur Armand de Mantel forgets mine," I replied, picking him up ere the words were fairly out of his mouth, and getting hotter and more careless with each sentence I uttered. I ended by eyeing him with an affected look of contempt, though contempt for him was well-nigh as far from my thoughts as love.

"I admit you once claimed the title of a seigneur, m'sieur," he said, as mildly as before.

"And I have heard you referred to as the Count de Lune," I returned. "But, like my sister, I doubt your right to the title. I know you usurped it once, and then committed murder to make it good."

"M'sieur, do you mean—" began Péan. But I was too hot to stop, and cut him short by continuing:

"M'sieur de Mantel, do you wish me to rehearse your various titles for the benefit of the chevalier? M'sieur, you are a pardoned criminal outlaw, a ravisher of women, a common thief, a murderer, and, lastly, a political adventurer, and this statement I will make good either by proofs in writing or by the sword now if you

A Friend in Need

desire. I ask no odds of you. I ask no time for preparation. Like a cowardly dog you ran from me once. What will you do now?"

The action of the human mind is most peculiar. When I began to speak my anger had filled me. I became so rabidly wrought against this man that I knew not what I said, and cared not. Discretion had no place in my mind, and I opened my wrath on him without a thought of self-control, the great effort on my part being to make him angry. But my very violence seemed to reduce my unreasoning spleen, and by the time I had completed my accusation I was as calm and clear-headed as I had ever been in my life. If I goaded him beyond endurance, it was not because I had any particular policy to carry out. It was through impulse and anger, and my words were hurled at the fellow without reflection. It was a boyish attack, but the instinct of a boy is often better than the reason of a man, for had I been a diplomat events proved that I could not have done a wiser thing. It was a sudden and complete exposition of my enmity to the officer before me, and under other circumstances, or with another witness, might have been fatal.

At all events, my words struck De Mantel, or De Lune, to the quick. He threw aside his assumed suavity. Like the coward he was, he coupled ten thousand devils in the oath that sputtered from him, and, drawing his sword, made a pass at me.

It took no great foresight to see what was coming and no great agility to avoid the thrust, for even before the weapon was fairly out of its sheath I had started for the table, and was behind it, with the chevalier betwixt us, before he could follow me. And it was here the chevalier took a hand. As I sprang behind him he drew his own rapier, and said:

"By St. Louis, De Lune, does your gorge rise at

The Strength of the Weak

a cloud of smoke, or is there fire under it? My faith, but you came near spitting an unarmed man, and, as you heard, my guest!”

“Guest!” returned De Mantel, his face changing from red to white as he pointed at me with his blade. “Has the upstart befooled you so completely? He is an Englishman, born and bred. I signed no pass for him or any one. He has deceived you. Neither is the man his servant nor the girl his sister. They are all of English blood and seek the colonies below. I tell you the fellow is my prisoner. I had him once and he escaped me.”

Péan turned and looked at me, and I drew encouragement from his face. Not that it bore any unusual kindness towards me, but its expression was such that it conveyed the idea that he was enjoying the discomfiture of his fellow officer.

“M’sieur le seigneur,” he said, emphasizing my title, “I will go so far as to insult the count by asking you if this be the truth?”

“M’sieur,” I replied, “so far as he goes, he is right. But I *am* the Seigneur de Mantel—a French subject, though of English blood. I fled with the girl and her brother to be rid of that man’s persecutions. There is no law to give me my rights against him. He honestly bears all the names with which I have honoured him, for this so-called count has ruined my home, murdered my father, and held in captivity the girl who has passed as my sister. Where could I look for help? I was forced to become a refugee. I was forced into duplicity in order to get through the lines. As for my blood, the quarrel over it is between the Almighty and the man who takes offence at it. M’sieur, there is no war, nor am I a soldier. How, then, can I be his prisoner—his rightful prisoner?”

Captain Péan looked at me a moment.

A Friend in Need

“M’sieur, I am far from damning you on account of your blood. My mother, may the Virgin intercede for her, was an Englishwoman.” He crossed himself devoutly. “But, to be frank, m’sieur, for it is a quality I see you possess, under the circumstances I can hardly continue to treat you as a guest.”

“No! And, by God, you say well!” broke in De Mantel. “Yield these people to me, chevalier. I will render an account of them.” He sheathed his sword as he spoke, and Péan, not to be outdone in courtesy, did the same with his.

“Well, hardly that,” returned the chevalier, with a coolness and a smile that must have exasperated the other. “These people have escaped from you. If they are prisoners at all, they are *my* prisoners. I fail to see your claim on them, my friend.”

The words were extremely polite, but the manner in which they were uttered and the steady way in which Péan looked into De Mantel’s eye, together with the rising colour that again glowed on the latter’s face, told me plainly that there was little love lost between the two men.

“Captain Péan,” I said, “I gladly surrender myself to you, and only trust that you will convince yourself of my truth by bringing me before General the Baron Dieskau, that the entire matter may be sifted to the bottom.”

I said this innocently, but it proved to be a move for which my enemy had little liking. His change of base was taken naturally enough, albeit it was sudden, and had I not a taste of his policy it might have deceived me. He threw himself into the chair from which he had risen to meet me, and, with an air of nonchalance, said:

“On my honour, chevalier, I have to beg your pardon for my heat. I had much against the boy’s father, who robbed me when I was a younger man.”

The Strength of the Weak

"You lie!" I vociferated.

He paid no attention to my interruption, but went on calmly, though he gave a deprecatory smile at my youthful violence. "I have nothing against him or the others. Keep them or let them go, as you will; but in this young man's interest I should not advise him to appeal to the baron in one breath and in the next be obliged to admit that he was travelling *incognito* towards the English colonies and under a forged pass."

"That will be a matter between him and the baron," said Péan.

"And it will be a matter of little moment compared to the proofs I will offer to General Dieskau—a document that will convince him that one of his staff is not only a blackleg but a murderer," I added, venomously.

"*Dieu de Dieu!*" exclaimed De Mantel, springing to his feet. "Chevalier Péan, will you sit and see me insulted in your own house? 'Fore God, I will chastise the fellow, whether or no!" And with this he again whipped his sword from its sheath and made a step forward, only to find his weapon crossed by that of the chevalier, whose action had been equally rapid.

"On my life," said Péan, "I begin to have some suspicion that the seigneur has been hardly dealt with! One does not bristle at the bark of a dog or bandy words with a gamin. Put up your sword, m'sieur count, or send for a friend. I will not permit my prisoner to be molested without my consent." He turned to me and continued: "M'sieur seigneur, do not count too much on my protection. I will tolerate no wild statements against a brother in arms."

The officer did not more than glance at me as he spoke, but kept his eye on De Mantel, as though he feared treachery.

A Friend in Need

"I make these charges in all sincerity," I returned. "I have incontestable proofs in writing that yonder villain is my father's murderer."

"Have you such proofs on your person?"

"No, m'sieur; but I can lay hands on them at any moment."

"By St. Louis, count," said the chevalier, drawing himself up, "these are indeed damnable charges! I fancy I now see why the maiden did not fall at your feet and worship you this morning."

This passing remark staggered me. So the hawk had been in the dove's nest. I could well imagine the fluttering caused by his advent, and on the matter of the maiden I would doubtless have had sufficient to say had it not been that the quarrel suddenly changed its course. Thwarted in his attack on me, and doubtless goaded by the chevalier's reference to the scornful treatment he had received from the girl, De Mantel turned his attention to the man who stood in his way. He drew back a pace, and his face indicated his temper as he spoke:

"M'sieur Captain Péan, you are inclined to take as a protégé the fellow who has not only openly flouted the tender of my friendship, but has insulted me by a villainous and impossible charge. You are far too willing to give credence to his wild and unsupported accusation, and by this position you make yourself liable to me."

The chevalier straightened himself, and the cool indifference of his face was in strong contrast to the other's heated countenance as he replied:

"I cannot possibly misunderstand you, m'sieur. I will satisfy any demand you may make on me, and at any time you desire; but, were I in your place, I should not allow this matter to go abroad. Here is a pretty floor and a fair light. There is room enough, and but

The Strength of the Weak

little likelihood of interruption, as Meltonne, who is quartered with me, is engaged elsewhere for the day. What do you say to a settlement now? You are undoubtedly aggrieved."

De Mantel's eye flashed from the chevalier to me and back again, but he hesitated a moment ere he said:

"It would be satisfactory enough, m'sieur, but it is inopportune. The baron may send for me at any moment. Besides, I must first settle with M'sieur Chatsworth."

"And that is precisely what I meant," returned Péan, hurriedly. "You cannot tamely submit to such words as the seigneur has used before a witness, be they true or false. Our matter can wait. If the seigneur recants, I will make amends for my position." He smiled a peculiar Frenchy smile—a smile that curled his small mustache, but gave no indication of either mirth or amusement. "Come," he continued, "let us drop the mask." He threw up both arms and tossed his sword on the table, then, with sudden alacrity, stepped into the adjoining room.

I looked at De Mantel. Though honest ugliness was written all over his face, his venom was not now wholly directed to me, for his eyes were fixed on the door through which the chevalier had disappeared. He was gone but a moment. He returned carrying another bared sword in his hand, and walking to the outer door closed it, and, placing his back against it, folded his arms, spread his legs, and addressed us both:

"Now, m'sieurs, for fair play. On my honour as a Knight of Malta, I will kill the first one that fouls. Come, Count de Lune, take us one by one. I waive any right I may have in favour of the seigneur, and I'll swear you will learn a lesson in sword play from your doubtful friend. Come, gentlemen, this is sport. Prepare; prepare and *en garde*. I will give satisfaction to

A Friend in Need

either who objects to my being umpire. M'sieur seigneur, you are the earliest aggrieved. You antedate me—aye, even Meltonne, who had an English bone to pick with the count. There on the table is my sword. If it suits you as well as your own I think you will leave me little to do.”

CHAPTER XXX

THE FIGHT

HE spoke like one who had weighed well his intended action, and there was no mistaking him. The look of gratitude I gave him must have made itself felt, for he said :

“Do not presume on my friendship, m’sieur seigneur. I know nothing of your rights. You have deceived me and insulted a brother officer. God knows I might have done the same under stress, but I know nothing of the circumstances. I am only here in the interest of fair play.”

He spoke seriously, but in him I saw a friend indeed. And it has always been thus with me. I am driven to the last extremity, when suddenly the Lord stretches forth his hand to lift me from the slough of despond. Would it be so were my cause unjust? Nay, I doubt it. I was ready to kiss the hand of the chevalier for the chance he gave me, and I grasped the rapier he had thrown down, caring little about its weight or balance so glad was I to get my fingers around a hilt.

And equally glad of the opportunity to close my mouth forever was the villainous count. With no knowledge of my ability as a swordsman, and filled with confidence in his own powers, he doubtless had small fear of the result of a passage with me. In a few moments he might make himself legal lord of the Seigneurie de Mantel and silence the only tongue that would be likely to denounce him for his past life. The expres-

The Fight

sion of his face had already changed, and the light in it was that of an unholy happiness. He threw off his coat and placed his back to the window, so that the glare from without would be in my eyes, a matter of little moment in my state of mind.

He had thrown his coat on the table, and stood whipping his rapier through the air while I was making myself ready, as though he was impatient to begin; but ere I could take my place he turned to the chevalier.

"M'sieur, the blood of this young man must be on his own head or on yours. You force me to this. Do you call yourself a gentleman—a nobleman of France—and yet be willing to sacrifice this boy? I have a fancy that M'sieur le Chevalier Péan thinks to tire me, that he may afterward make an easy conquest, eh, m'sieur? The sixteenth Chasseurs are noted for their policy."

He smiled grimly, still whipping his sword, and waited for an answer. The chevalier's face lost its little smile and turned dark as he replied:

"Am I the challenged party, M'sieur Count de Lune?"

"I certainly wish you to understand that you cannot call me to account for any action of mine, m'sieur."

"Then, as within the next few minutes the count's right arm is indeed in danger of becoming tired if not paralyzed, I will give him the right to choose swords or pistols, as pleases him. It is useless to temporize further. Proceed to your lesson, m'sieur. If after it you manage to wing me, you will be obliged to meet M'sieur Meltonne, and after him, probably every officer of the regiment you have insulted—that is, if we admit that the staff can insult the line."

The count swung around towards me without answering. I was about to advance and engage without the courtesy of even a salute, when he dropped the point he had raised and exclaimed:

The Strength of the Weak

“I object to this as unfair and wholly irregular. I will not be baited like a bull in a ring. I demand representation.”

He had partly turned his back on me as he thus spoke to Péan. I was astonished at this quick change, but my blood was up to the pitch of acting, and I was in no mood to be balked again by either his cowardice or his policy. Turning the flat of my sword against him I struck him across the shoulders and cried:

“Appeal to me, you villain!”

He answered not a word, but turned on me like a panther, and our blades met.

Now, it is fairly well known to those who are advanced in the decaying art of fencing, that by the way a man parries a first attack can be told where he is most liable to lay himself open to his adversary. And, moreover, that portion of the body he leaves open in himself is most often the point towards which he will address his attack on his enemy. The individuality expressed in the play of the noble art or amusement of fencing is as strong and as characteristic as handwriting, though only an expert can distinguish leading traits. What little I had seen of De Mantel's defence in the combat betwixt him and Peyrotte led me to suspect that he gave most of his attention to the lower part of his body, and to his left side rather than to his right, for he fenced with more of a full front than any man with whom I ever crossed swords. I took this to be from his practice of fencing with sword in one hand and dagger in the other, a custom which obtained at that time only in duels *à l'outrance*, for the dagger was never resorted to in combats among gentlemen except the battle was to be fought *in extremis*.

Our swords came together with a clash, and for a moment remained rigidly crossed, each feeling the strength of the pressure of the other's wrist. I could

The Fight

no more have broken down his guard at that time than I could have flown through the window that stood open behind him. But there is more potency in brain than in brawn—almost always. I gave way gently, as if forced, then felt towards his point, the two steels making a soft, oily note, too light to be called a noise, too suggestive to be music. Then I tested his guard by making a *disengage* and a thrust in *seconde*. It was perfectly parried, and a quick return was made in *tierce*, which latter I avoided, because I knew it would follow. I was now fairly sure of his weak point, and determined to let his body alone. For a full three minutes we fenced, and I felt I had a man whose mettle was nearer my own than any one who had ever honoured me with a bout. And this gave me comfort, for with a knowledge of his skill came a lightening of my conscience—there would be no taint of murder in my killing him.

When we fell apart to regain breath my adversary's face was white, probably from rage. I knew mine must be red enough, for the perspiration was pouring from it. De Mantel was breathing hard—as I was for that matter—and he looked towards the door, only to see all possible egress closed, as Péan had let down the bar that we might suffer no interruption. That gentleman was enthusiastic.

“By St. Michael and his two-edged sword,” he exclaimed, “I feel like a poltroon! Faith, 'tis magnificent, and I am enjoying it alone!” And his eyes shone in the keenness of his pleasure in witnessing two of his fellows fighting for life. The brutal instincts of all three of us were in full play as I again crossed swords with my adversary.

I think neither of us was tired. Certainly I was not; but the old weakness of impatient rage began to take possession of my enemy, and then I felt my victory over him would be only a matter of time; that I would

The Strength of the Weak

have him if I did not become overconfident and handle myself with consequent carelessness.

I had now directed my efforts against the man's face, as he had always done to mine, and we were both fencing high when the end came. Twice I had met with narrow escapes, and had become wary, when a hot pass he made gave me the ghost of an opening. Like a flash I drove for his thick throat, the thrust being almost free. He caught my blade in *glissade* in time to throw my point upward, but not in time to make the lunge abortive. The steel, travelling rapidly along his, rose further each inch it progressed, but he could not stop it then. My point entered between his lips, met his clinched teeth, slid along the inside of his mouth on the upper jaw, coming out through his cheek a little forward of his left ear.

With a sound betwixt a cry of pain and one of rage, he brought up his left hand and caught my blade. His hold was so firm that I had no time to wrench free my weapon, for I saw the coming stroke that would run me through. There was but one thing for me to do, and that to drop my weapon, which I did, retreating across the room entirely unarmed.

With blood streaming from his mouth, De Mantel pulled my sword from the wound, dashed it to the floor, and, with eyes as wild as a maniac's, leaped after me. I had but just time to spring behind the table when there came a tremendous hammering on the front door. Péan immediately lifted the bar, but before it was fairly off, the door was dashed open, and Meltonne hurried in.

"Stop—stop, in the name of God, gentlemen! The baron is at hand and half the camp can hear you." A false statement, as I do not believe we were heard two rods away. He stood in the centre of the room and looked about in wonder at the scene, though his eyes questioned the chevalier, who was well-nigh as ex-

The Fight

cited as either De Mantel or myself. And indeed it was a tableau, for with his entry each of the actors became stationary. De Mantel on one side of the table, with blood flowing from his face, his eyes losing nothing of their ferocity as he turned them upon the cause of the interruption; Péan, who had only ceased his excited dance when he opened the door, but who now gathered his dignity; and I, red-faced, panting, and alert, with my hands on the broad table ready to spring to the right, the left, or under it, according to my enemy's next move, my aim my sword, which lay on the floor well out of reach.

Perhaps for five seconds we all stood thus, and De Mantel was about to renew the pursuit when there came a sound of footsteps approaching, the musical clatter of jangling metal, and the door was darkened by three men, who entered.

Though I had only seen the back of Baron Dieskau, and that at a distance, I knew him at once. He seemed to climb over the door-sill. He was a short, stocky man, with a red face, and his air was rather that of an overdressed Dutchman than a Frenchman of renown. But his countenance was not unkindly, despite the frown that contracted his scant eyebrows as his glance took in the state of affairs, for it was too late to attempt to disguise matters in the least.

"What, m'sieurs—fighting?" he asked, turning on De Mantel and Péan, though his eye questioned me if his tongue did not. "Have we not enough to do with those in front? Great God, m'sieur, you bleed horribly! What is your name, m'sieur captain?" he concluded, turning to Péan.

"The Chevalier Péan, General Dieskau."

"Hah! Related to that rascal, the subdirector of Friponne?"

"No, general."

The Strength of the Weak

“The better for you, by St. Louis! You are both under arrest for duelling. Do you think regulations are only for the file? You know the rule. Your swords, gentlemen.”

Without the least hesitation Péan tendered his sword to his superior, who motioned an aide to receive it, and without a word De Mantel did the same. As his weapon passed from his hand he presented about as unlovely an aspect as could well be imagined. Though his wound was not serious, and could not then have been very painful, it was shocking to look at, while his white face, matted beard, and gory shirt made him a repulsive picture. The general frowned with great impressiveness as he took in the appearance of his staff officer. Then his eye caught the sword I had used, and which still lay on the floor.

“Were you *all* at it?” he asked, looking up quickly and speaking in his jerky, choleric way. I was about to answer, but Péan interposed.

“That is my sword, your lordship,” he exclaimed, evidently desiring to take the weight of the entire affair from me. But this was a position I would not sanction, though my heart was filled with gratitude at his self-sacrifice, although I failed to understand it then. Two hours before I had looked upon him as a questionable friend, at most—one whom I was willing to deceive, from whom I wished to flee; but then, as he stood there calmly taking my fault upon his shoulders, I could have embraced him. This revulsion of feeling was too genuine and I was too impressed by his generosity to permit him to bear the brunt of this trouble, especially as I felt that my honesty would in no way hurt my cause. Therefore, I found my voice.

“Your lordship,” I put in, “that is indeed the chevalier’s sword, but I used it. The chevalier has had no part in this quarrel. He is generously taking the bur-

The Fight

den that belongs to me. It was I who was fighting with M'sieur De Mantel."

The little general wheeled about and looked hard at me, scanning my dress and the raggedness of my young beard with a look that carried no compliment with it.

"With whom?"

"With M'sieur Captain de Mantel, your excellency."

"Have a care, young man. You know, doubtless, that your words can be construed as an insult. He is the Count de Lune."

"I doubt it, your excellency," I returned, with a bow.

"Who are you, sir?" he asked, snappishly.

"The lord of the Seigneury de Mantel, your lordship."

"A mere boy, by St. Louis!" he said, opening his small eyes and turning to his staff.

"Yes, your lordship."

"Pouff! Then there were two of you on the count. You must needs be brave men. No wonder he was pricked."

"I fought him alone, your lordship," I replied, with a little warmth. "The chevalier but stood in judgment."

"Ha, a likely story! Where are you from? Have you a commission?"

"No, your lordship."

"How is this, chevalier?" asked the general, turning with a sudden, about-face motion, as though he was a weather-cock pivoted at the heels.

Péan took a step forward. "Your lordship, the seigneur and the count were settling a matter of long standing—a matter about which the seigneur has travelled from his estate to lay before your lordship. He claims the civil law will not protect him."

The Strength of the Weak

"There is no civil law under Vaudreuil," returned Dieskau, whose enmity to the governor of New France was well known to most people, though unguessed by me at the time.

"Your lordship is quite right," continued Péan, "so I understand. And as for his ability to take care of himself, you should have seen the bout, your excellency. By the Lord, the seigneur could cross swords with any man in Europe!"

The chevalier had waxed enthusiastic, but the general was not carried away, though he looked at me with increased interest, somewhat due to the covert compliment Péan had given him in stating my supposed preference for him as a judge. But there was no increase to the kindness of his voice or manner as he measured me with his eye and said:

"M'sieur seigneur, I cannot pardon you for taking the law into your own hands. I must hear your appeal, a thing I cannot do at present—not until I return. Until then I shall place you also under arrest, young man. Take him to the guard-house." He turned abruptly and attempted to stride to the door, but the strained step, the affectation of height and dignity were ludicrous. Before he had got across the floor Péan overtook him, and, stepping before him, saluted and said:

"At the risk of offending your lordship, I would beg that your lordship would remember the seigneur is a lord of France, and that the guard-house would be a degradation—it would be an insult. He has come to appeal to your lordship. Why should he be confined? I will answer for him. I ask this as a favour."

His lordship stopped in the doorway and wheeled about with his jerky motion, the light shooting from a score of glittering points—buttons, epaulettes, and orders—as he stood in the broad, hot sunshine.

The Fight

“Well—well, perhaps so. Keep him under guard, chevalier.”

“And your lordship has heard that I am guiltless, and yet I am still under arrest,” insinuated Péan.

“You have a tongue, at least, chevalier,” returned Dieskau. “Give him his sword. I will probe the matter later.” And he motioned to the officer who held the surrendered weapon. He was about passing out, but, instead of doing so, turned to the bleeding man, who still stood by the table vainly trying to stanch the flow from his wound with a handkerchief, and, in a harsher tone than he had yet used, said:

“Count de Lune, you are on parole. Report the fact to the adjutant and get you to the hospital. You bleed like the devil and cannot speak for yourself at present. Come, gentlemen, we are late.”

De Mantel made no attempt to answer. He strode out of the room, passing close to Péan, and giving that officer a look I will never forget. As though yet suspicious that all was not right, Dieskau stepped to the inner chamber and glanced within, then, without further remark, left the house, followed by all save Péan and myself.

CHAPTER XXXI

FREE TO ACT

By the look on my face, Péan probably saw my gratitude to him struggling for words. As he turned from the door I held out my hand, but he chilled me, as he passed without seeming to notice it, and threw himself into a chair.

"Do not be overenthusiastic, my friend," he said. "M'sieur le seigneur, I profess to being an honest man, as men go, and believe you are one also, and probably as innocent a one as has fallen to my lot to meet and know. Had I not thought so I would not have lifted a finger for you. As it is, I have done so more in enmity to De Lune than for any love of you, m'sieur. Never mind about thanks. Your sword has punished a villain—a card-sharper who hides his tracks so well that one cannot reach him openly. He has well-nigh ruined Meltonne, and I love Meltonne. It is enough. You say he is also a pardoned criminal and has committed murder?"

"Yes."

"You have proofs, you say. Who holds them?"

"Leonard Spaulding, the voyageur who posed as my servant. You see I am trusting you, m'sieur."

"You will not regret it. And the count knows such proofs exist?"

"He has persecuted me and almost killed me to get them. He held me a prisoner in my own house and without warrant."

Free to Act

“In your helpless condition you are unfortunate in having the count as an enemy. It is a pity you did not kill him. But, by St. Louis, I fancy he has enough on his hands at present! You are wise to appeal to the baron. He is a just man, though a trifle weak. He will forgive the count, but the count will never forgive either you or me. See the baron as soon as he returns.”

“Thank you for your advice,” I answered; “but might I not better settle the matter by leaving and——”

“Nay, nay, m’sieur le seigneur,” he interrupted, with a frown and a shake of the head. “I have saved you from the degradation of the guard-house; you will save me the disgrace of letting you escape. I have vouched for you. Before going further I shall ask you to give me your word not to play me false—your word of honour. I will be content with that and put you on parole. You are not to go beyond the walls of the fort while in my charge.”

This was a demand I was hardly prepared for, as to get beyond the French camp appeared imperative. If I laid my case before the pompous little general matters would not necessarily go in my favour. There was small doubt in my mind that the baron would cut the knot of the difficulty by sending the maiden, the voyageur, and myself back to Montreal or Quebec to await the end of the present campaign. In either city we would certainly fall into the clutches of Cadet, and he would know what to do with me at least. *Oubliettes* were not confined to Europe, and the spirit of the Inquisition was far from dead even in the New World.

But I did not even hesitate. I had been trained to honour, and held no mental reservation as I answered:

“Perhaps it might have been better for me had I gone to the guard-house, but I have already accepted your protection. I have no lack of appreciation. Have

The Strength of the Weak

no fear for me, m'sieur. I will pledge you my word not to escape so long as you are responsible for me."

"*Nom du diable!* young man. Could I but see the way for you to escape from the guard-house I would hand you over. But it is impossible, and to leave now would be to ruin me, else I would counsel you to do it. You are wise if you remain here. You are wise if you stay indoors and out of harm's way. A bullet may be hired, m'sieur, and the count will stop at nothing if you have been telling the truth, which I doubt not. You have scarred his beauty, too—another unpardonable sin. Ah, it is my turn with him now! I will see how he fares."

He arose to his feet, buckled on his sword, and stretched his tall form, as though life was once again a bore now that the excitement of the fight was over. He walked to the door humming a French chanson.

"*Au revoir*, m'sieur. I retract. You are still my guest. All I have here is yours; but we are enemies, remember. You are an Englishman, but, on the blood of my mother, I find it hard to hate you. *Au revoir.*"

He kissed the tips of his fingers to me in a way that in an Englishman would have been either absurd or insulting, but in the Frenchman it was like the flutter of a ribbon on a woman's dress—a bit of natural ornamentation. It is strange that in this attitude, bending slightly forward with his finger-tips on his smiling mouth, I remember him most strongly. I never saw him again.

Left alone, I sat in the chair, though it was not many minutes ere I began to look through the quarters which was and bid fair to be my prison for a time. As I have said, the house consisted of two rooms, the walls, top, and partition being of rough, unhewn logs, with the bark in all its beauty still covering the timbers, a pleasure to the eye where the lichen still clung to it, and a

Free to Act

convenient hiding-place for vermin should they once get a foothold in the primitive structure. In the inner room I found two bunks built against the partition, with rough woollen curtains, like bed-curtains, to keep off the fearful draughts of winter. There was absolutely no furniture in this dim den, but the officers' portmanteaus were lying open on the floor, where boots and portions of dress were scattered about. An old uniform hung from a peg on the wall, and a basin of dirty water showed the extent of the luxury of the quarters. It was a melancholy looking place. There was nothing in or about either of the rooms to command interest, and not a word to read—not even a French novel or a newspaper; though the lack of the latter caused me no surprise, for, at that date, in all the length and breadth of New France there was not a printing-press.* Therefore, I returned to the larger room, drew my chair near the open window, with its oiled-paper panes, and fell to thinking.

And my thoughts were not pleasant, which is not to be wondered at, albeit the fact that I had a wily friend without and an unexpected helping hand close to me kept me from despair. My mind now went to the girl as much as to my own case, and somehow I had little fear for her, or active fear for myself, for that matter, though the outlook for our expedition southward did not appear flattering at that moment. From my seat I could see the line of the fort's walls, but immediately beyond them my view was cut off by the walls themselves, and a number of houses similar to the one I was in restricted my view of the parade. The trees in the vicinity of the fortification had been cut away to clear a line for the fire of the fort's guns as well as for the abattis that was intended to obstruct an enemy's ad-

* Canada had no printing-press until about 1772.

The Strength of the Weak

vance on its front. But in the distance there was a wealth of colour, the lake and the forest beyond it blending in a beauty found only in the combination of land and water. Some soldiers were mounting a gun at the extreme southern end of the fort, and quite close to me were two others, their muskets lying along the sod, throwing dice on the top of a stump. Men were going and coming, but none save the dicers were near the house, which lay well beyond the track of daily military duty. The sentry at the distant gate appeared to be but a figure-head, for I had passed him without being challenged, and had little doubt that my way would be clear had I chosen to break my parole. In my solitude I had not even the solace of tobacco. The droning of the summer insects filled the air, and once in a while a breath of hot wind drove in on me. The call of a distant man and the occasional note of a bird were the only obtrusive sounds that broke the stillness of the quiet afternoon.

For long I sat at the window in a state of mind that might be called uncertain, though I remember that I felt no great anxiety as to the future, and wondered at the fact. Though the silence and loneliness finally grew irksome, the only matter that disturbed me was the feeling that the voyageur could know nothing of my condition, and I wished he could be made aware of the peculiar bond that kept me from going to him. I hoped for the early return of Péan or his servant, that I might get word to my friend, and was even casting about for some means of writing, when my eye caught sight of Lieutenant Meltonne coming towards the house.

But his manner was far from being natural. There was none of the languid swagger of ultra-self-satisfaction which usually marked all his actions. Instead, he was almost running, and even staggered at times, as though partly intoxicated. This latter was somewhat

Free to Act

strange in him, for he had always carried his wine without a hint of its influence, save in a somewhat heightened colour. In this fashion of hurry he came on, and almost fell into the room; indeed, he did fall into the chair, and, grasping its rough arms to steady himself, he looked at me with an expression on his face I had never seen before, and seemed to choke as he gasped:

“Péan is dead! Péan is dead! Holy Jésus! Holy Virgin! Péan is dead!”

I looked at him in something more than wonder. His wail was like the cry of the bereaved David; and though among the last words I had heard from the chevalier was the assertion that he loved Meltonne, and that this love furnished his animus against De Mantel, I had not dreamed of the depth of affection between the two men that was indicated in the cry of the stricken Frenchman before me.

“Dead!” I exclaimed, aghast at the information, its suddenness, and, at first, its possible effect on me, though at the same time I realized that I was no longer bound by my word of honour.

“Yes—yes—oh, yes! Oh, misery! Oh, *mon Dieu!* *Mon Dieu!* It was a duel! He was shot by the count at the first fire. They had words. I cannot tell you. I cannot tell you.”

But he did tell me finally; walking up and down the floor, wringing his white hands the while, though I had to drag the story from him in a way that seemed brutal under the circumstances.

It appeared that when Péan had left me he had gone to the hospital, where he had naturally come in contact with De Mantel. There the ill temper of both had vented itself, and there had been words between them—not many on the part of the count; for though his wound was superficial, its nature made long speech impossible. Within an hour after the two had parted, the chevalier

The Strength of the Weak

was presented with a challenge, or rather a demand that the promise made earlier in the day should be immediately fulfilled. The code obtaining made it impossible to do aught but obey the summons; and the chevalier, securing Meltonne for his second, had, with all the parties interested, gone into the forest, where a favourable spot for the duel was selected. At the first exchange Péan had been shot through the head, dying without having uttered a word. The count had not been touched.

There were but few details to the recital, yet the whole picture of the tragedy was clear enough. The body of the chevalier had been brought back and lay in the guard-house, but of the whereabouts of the count Meltonne could tell me nothing, and had only heard that the commandant of the post had suspended him from his rank pending the return of General Dieskau, who had gone back to Carillon early in the afternoon.

I had never seen fury and grief so equally intermixed as in the young officer from whom I wrung this account of the death of his friend. At one moment he would be whispering to himself, as though his wits were in danger; the next, his tears were mingling with prayers to a variety of Catholic saints, and later all softness would disappear in the curses and threats of vengeance that sprang from him, as though the fountain of his hate was overcharged. When he had ranted and wept and prayed for above an hour, he grew somewhat calmer, and finally turned to me in a mood bordering the rational, and said:

“M’sieur, I scarcely know what I have done or said, but I have come to you to be taught again the stroke by which you once disarmed me. I have borne you no love, m’sieur, but it was because I supposed you a friend to that villain. I did not know better until I saw you had fought him; now I know it all. Péan—oh, *mon*

Free to Act

Dieu! my poor Péan—he has told me. Pardon my weakness. I am distracted; but I could love you, English as you are, if you will but make me perfect in that stroke of the rapier. I will make you a return. By to-morrow, m'sieur, you will be in the hands of the authorities—by to-morrow—and, m'sieur, to-morrow at sunrise I am to meet the Count de Lune. You understand. It is to be swords."

I cannot begin to convey the wild eagerness with which he spoke—the fierce hurry of his words—plainly written here, but I understood all he meant to convey. Now I could raise another ally by a simple lesson in fencing, and be bound to no one, and my heart leaped at the thought of freedom, though I knew it had been purchased at the heavy price of the death of the man who had stood my friend when I most needed one.

I had grounded Meltonne in the trick of swordsmanship he so wished to know, and it would not have taken me long to have made him perfect in it, though I had small faith that it would avail him much against his enemy, and so told him. His grief, keen though it was, and of the rushing, impetuous quality that bespoke its short life, was so tinctured with the desire for revenge, that I had a fancy he might serve my ends as well as his own by killing the inhuman monster whose existence was to me and to those I loved a constant menace.

Therefore, I was ready enough to give him his lesson at any price or at no price at all. He had his sword at his side, and I the one I had fought with. We stood in the centre of the room and crossed weapons, but barely had the steels touched when, like adverse fate, there came a knock at the door. With an oath Meltonne dropped his point, and stepping to the door, opened it. Before the threshold stood an officer, who, taking one step into the room, clapped his heels together, and said:

The Strength of the Weak

"M'sieur Lieutenant Meltonne is wanted at headquarters at once." With that his formality dropped from him like a cloak, and, coming forward, he continued:

"My faith, Eugene, you had better prepare yourself; you are to be placed under arrest. The colonel has wind of your meeting to-morrow."

Meltonne looked at the man in dumb astonishment, then rattled a long-drawn "*Sacr-r-r-é!*" as he drove the point of his sword into the planks of the floor.

"Who could have told it?" he demanded.

"By my faith, I think it was the count himself who gently let the fact escape him," was the answer.

"Does he hope to escape me by that? *Mon Dieu*, I'll meet him if I lose my commission! Am I to go to headquarters under escort?"

"No, not so bad as that; but I would go at once. I am but obeying orders from the colonel. *Au revoir*, Eugene. He has the regiment to deal with if he escapes from you." He went out, and Meltonne sank into the chair with both anger and despair written on his countenance and attitude. At last he broke out with an oath.

"It is of no use. The devil has a move ahead of me." Then, getting to his feet, he continued with considerable animation: "He seeks you, m'sieur. I am as nothing to him at present. My time is yet to come. Péan was right. The last thing he said to me was that the count would get you in the end; that you were too honest. Ah, m'sieur, your interest has been burdened by your innocence, but you are free to act at last! Together we will deal a blow. Listen, m'sieur. When I go out there will be none to hinder you from getting into my friend's uniform that hangs within. The guards would honour you as you pass and—and, m'sieur, if I unhinge my military honour——"

Free to Act

He stopped and looked at me intently, then held out his hand.

"Well?" I said, as I put my hand in his and suspected what was coming.

"Let it be a legacy from my dead brother," he exclaimed, as he shook my hand and lightly tossed it away. "On my faith, I have crossed palms with an Englishman, and to-day is the day of St. James.* St. James! What a word for a countersign. And the month is that of July; a convenient parole, on my soul. *Voilà tout*. I thought never to do an Englishman a favour. Adieu, m'sieur, adieu."

He smiled at me, but the expression in his great black eyes belied his lips, and before I could thank him for his suggestion or question him, he picked up his plumed chapeau and went out.

* July 25th.

CHAPTER XXXII

THROUGH THE FRENCH CAMP

HE left me standing there, but I lost little time in figuring on his honesty, as his motive could be nothing but fair, and his words and manner bore every mark of sincerity. I had given no thought to the means of escaping, because never for a moment had I considered the possibility of breaking my word to Péan, but from that moment I gave my attention to escape and nothing else. If I knew anything, I knew De Mantel was aware of my parole to the chevalier, and was certain he would realize that the death of Péan had set me free. My knowledge of military affairs was not profound, but my winter in Quebec had given me a little insight into military customs, and I knew that, as a staff officer, De Mantel had no power to command in his own right, so that any action he took against me would be without the sanction of military authority, inasmuch as a staff officer can only carry and transmit an order from his superior. There was little to reassure me in this, as plain logic led me to believe that he would not stand idle until the authorities took cognizance of my case, but would act in a manner to suit himself, which act would bring anything but good to me. A sneaking shot through the window or a forcible abduction were among the possibilities, and the only time he might lose would be that time it would take for him to hire a tool. This makes strange reading in these days, but then the times were raw. Such outrages were in no way uncommon. Excess was a word

Through the French Camp

that had little meaning then, though the fact was over-worked.

It was by this late in the afternoon, as I could see by the slant of the sunlight. The lengthening shadow of the houses lay soft over the green of the parade. Even in my growing excitement I was both impressed and soothed by the beauty of the world without. A robin standing tall on the close verdure called to its mate. The sky was the deepest blue and the heat of the declining sun was mellowed by a breeze from the lake. The softness of it—the glory of the clouds, the glory of the land, the aspect of peace in the midst of preparations for war—gave me a longing for liberty, a longing such as I had experienced when in my own cellar I seemed doomed to starvation, and I was still beset by the same tormentor who had then decreed my death.

With a quick and grateful consciousness of the difference between then and now, I turned from the window from which I had been looking and hurried into the other room with a sudden fear that if I did not at once leave the house something would happen to prevent my going. The necessity for disguise was apparent if I wished to leave camp or even pass through it without being questioned. I got into the uniform readily enough, it fitting *mé* fairly well, though somewhat loose; but the high boots I was compelled to put on pinched my feet and tried me sorely in the beginning, while the chapeau I donned was as small for my head as were the boots for my feet, its hard rim and its weight making it as uncomfortable as though I had topped myself with an iron pot. I dared not carry the sword, for I could not find its scabbard, and as the boots seemed to anchor me like a ball and chain, I stuffed my shoes into the waistband of the breeches, determined to get into them at the first opportunity. I left nothing of my own behind me save my well-worn tunic, which I hid in

The Strength of the Weak

a bunk, and, when all was ready, took a last look about, drew two or three long breaths, and, all unarmed, opened the door and strode out.

But I strode only a few steps, for the boots cut me cruelly, and I was forced to change my pace to a mincing gait, which, fortunately, had its counterpart in the affected walk of many French officers. The two soldiers dicing on the stump sprang to their feet and saluted me as I passed, which pleased me mightily, and, with this test to give me encouragement, I walked along as though I was on stilts, or, better, limping like a hen with a wooden leg. I had no more trouble at the gate than at the stump, for the sentry rang a "present" with his piece as he saw my supposed rank, my strange face being nothing to him in a camp filled with officers coming and going. With my heart still thumping, but considerably more at ease, I passed into the thick of the forest of conelike tents and its swarming multitude, threading my way past groups of soldiers intent on the then universal game of "bassett," the stakes of which was the card-money of the time.*

The interest in "bassett" saved me from close scrutiny, which was fortunate, as by this my feet had become a curse. I fairly hobbled, and the intense pain had so subdued my spirit that I might have surrendered to a child, had one challenged me. Had an occasion arisen demanding a recourse to my wits, I would have failed lamentably, and I take it no man can carry a clear head while his heels are held in a red-hot vise, and that was about the way mine felt. But for all that I escaped the test, my head came near being tried, as I had a shock when I was in the thickest of the soldiery, and it made

* *Card-money* was a currency issued by the French government in 1685, and so called from having been printed upon ordinary playing cards. It rapidly depreciated and was of little or no value in 1755, being withdrawn four years later. Specimens still exist.

Through the French Camp

me more than anxious to get out. In very plain terms, I saw the Abnakis, L'Anguille. He was among a group of Indians sitting about a newly kindled fire (for the red-skins were mingled with the whites, curiosity or a chance to thief having brought them from their own camp). If the savage saw me, he did not know me in my new rig; but I knew him, for he got up and moved off ahead of me, and there was no mistaking the sliding, slippery progress of the fellow. It gave my heart an additional jump, even though there was no occasion for it, and I turned sharply away in another direction, hoping I would soon be able to get the ear of the voyageur and warn him. I met many salutes, and returned them with great seriousness of countenance, that my face might not invite good fellowship, and finally I wound down towards the store-houses, passed them in safety, and so came to the quieter and built-up quarter where Jessie had been lodged.

I knew the house, for I had been there that morning, though in this never-ending day it seemed a year ago. The cabin stood back from the beach at the end of a row of a dozen like it, all built on the same plan as the one I had but just quitted. I should have approached the window and peeped in had it been open, but it was shut, as was the door, which, considering the weather and the hour, caused me to wonder, and the oiled paper standing for panes glared at me like jaundiced eyes.

There was nothing for it but to inquire, so I pulled myself as straight as the pain in my feet would allow, and, approaching the door, rapped loudly. No answer forthcoming, with a sinking heart I tried the fastening. It yielded readily enough and I entered; but ere I could get a glance at the interior I was set upon by some one who gripped me by the throat, and, my feet being in no condition to resist attack, sudden or otherwise, in a trice

The Strength of the Weak

I was upon my back, my wind shut off in an iron grasp, absolutely helpless under the weight of the silent man who had assaulted me.

To be choked to death in health is a terrible thing, and I was as sure that my hour had come as that I was lying on my back with my feet thrashing wildly about. My hands had grasped the wrists of the man atop of me. His face I did not mark in the shock of my fall and the suddenness of the onset, but I might as well have tried to uproot an oak as to move him. My natural thought was that I had been trapped, my enemy having counted on my steering straight for the girl's house, and this was to be the end of me. The thought came and went like a flash, for this solution of the matter had barely entered my head when I saw the man on top of me was Leonard Spaulding himself, and the very devil shone in his eyes until they caught mine.

Then with a shout he loosed his hold on me, and I went into a half-swoon as I felt the pressure on my chest and throat ease away and my breath come fair again. And when I regained my scattered wits there was Jessie standing before me as I sat in a chair, to which I had been lifted, and, with a great gourd of water in her hand, she was ministering to me as she had done twice before. Her brother hung over me with a look in his eyes that was something wonderful, and from that minute I knew I held a place in the heart of the voyageur.

The way my throat had been pinched made a sorry failure of my first efforts at speaking, but finally I managed to get my voice and thank God I had not been sent into the next world before being recognised. The voyageur gave a mighty cough at that, and, squeezing my hand, turned away and went into the next room, while Jessie said:

"And had Leonard killed you, m'sieur, I fancy you

Through the French Camp

would have suffered less than he—less than I. You would have been on the better side of it. We might have lived and remembered. It is horrible to think upon.” She sat herself on a chair by my side, her beautiful soft eyes looking at me in a way that might have brought me to life again had I been dying; while not to be considered a weakling, and moved by a mighty pride, I got to my feet to go to her brother. But betwixt feet and throat, I fear I presented but a sorry spectacle, for the former had swollen so I could scarcely stand, and the latter had been so roughly handled that my voice squeaked like a rusty firelock when I essayed to answer her. Presently Spaulding came back and helped me off with the fetters that had bound me; and when I got into my cool shoes, which were like old friends, matters took on a new light. My head worked better and I could think. Then I told them of all that had happened me since I had left the woodsman, he standing by the door the while, as though to grasp the first who entered. I spoke again of my fear of De Mantel, and asked Spaulding if he had heard anything of our old enemy, at which he smiled grimly, and, moving towards the inner room, said:

“Come in here, lad.”

I went in after him, and to my astonishment saw a man lying in a bunk, bound and gagged. I failed to recognise him at first, but finally knew the fellow. It was the soldier who had borne the flag of truce to the house when we were besieged, the man we had imprisoned in the kitchen, the self-confessed deserter. He looked at me, and his glance was baleful enough as it played over the uniform. His eye had the same bright malignancy I have seen in the eye of a venomous snake pinned to the earth by a forked stick. I turned to the voyageur with a look of inquiry. He answered it by saying:

The Strength of the Weak

“ I think God’s hand is with us, lad. After you left me I ran in here to bid the lass be of good cheer, though my own heart was then low enough. Then later I heard how ye had pricked the devil in the face an’ was a prisoner, though where I knew not and feared to be inquisitive. When I came back I found our friend here had been trying to frighten an’ cajole Jessie, that she might give up certain papers he had been told she had. In this I see he was but the emissary of the count; but he used no violence, for both the major an’ his lady were here, an’ he dared not go so far as to search, for fear of interference, or, perhaps, for fear of exposing his master. However, as luck would have it, the major had been ordered to Carillon, an’ was packed for movin’, and so went. God alone knows what would have happened the girl when left alone, for she had refused to go from the house until one of us returned; but in the nick o’ time the Almighty brought me on the scene, just as the fellow was about to search her by force. I tell ye, my son, there was scant courtesy lost between me an’ our very quiet friend there, for I had him by the throat an’ on the floor ere he could shout for help. I choked him, lad, and ye have had a taste of what that means. I tell ye the choke is salutary. I learned the hold from a red-skin, and I held this fellow’s pipe until he was black in the face and ceased to move. Mighty king! I would have killed him but for Jessie. She, bein’ a woman, has just a sense o’ that softness that a man lacks, an’ she saved him for a choice betwixt repentance an’ a rope. I fancy the rope will come first. Well, there he is; an’ I had determined to serve any interference the same way, expecting this man would be followed up by the count himself, when along came ye dressed like a popinjay in borrowed feathers. I fairly thought I had the right man this time, an’, mighty king, but I came nigh to damning myself forever and ever! But Jehovah has

Through the French Camp

us in his hand. He has brought us together again. If I had forebodings before, I have none now."

In my own mind, though cheered by events, I did not have his confidence. I knew the impossibility of escaping from the camp by land, and considered that now there might be great risk in attempting it by boat. Then, too, hiding within the lines was out of the question, and the cursed Abnakis might get wind of our presence at any moment. The prospects were not calculated to lift my spirits. When I told Spaulding of the Indian, he said:

"I have seen him, too. It is one reason I have for keeping myself housed, for I cannot shoot him here. Whether or no he has wind o' us, I know not; we may be lost to him among so many, but I am taking no chances. We will wait for night."

And there was absolutely nothing to do but await the advent of evening, that its dusk might be a partial shelter to us when we went forth. Everything had been made ready to move, and with my rapier once again at my hip and my rifle at hand I felt more like myself. During the hour of suspense before the start Spaulding stood by the door on guard and Jessie at the now half-open window, with me not far from her. She did not have a great deal to say in return to my words, but it was enough for me to know that she was listening with interest as I went somewhat deeper into the details of the day and my fight with De Mantel, her sweet eyes looking straight into mine, their wonderful depths unfathomable, her red lips half-open, and her head slightly inclined.

"And I might have missed you," I concluded; "for had not Péan been killed I was bound to stay his prisoner without escape possible until passed from his hands. By then you would have been far on your way, I hope."

The Strength of the Weak

She looked very serious for a moment, and then said :

“ And do you hope that? Do you think that Leonard would have left you, m’sieur? Would you have left him? ”

“ Decidedly not,” I protested ; “ but in this case you—a maiden—were to be considered.”

“ Do you think a woman less generous than a man, m’sieur le seigneur? ” she asked, drawing herself up with an air of dignity. “ If so, I will disabuse you. Had Leonard suggested leaving you in your misfortune, I should have lost my respect for him. It is impossible. You did not stop to consider when I was in danger, and you have also done much for him. No, m’sieur, your generosity is losing its quality when you imply that *we* could be ungenerous.”

It was both strange and fascinating to hear and see this girl. The contrast between her costume and the feminine grace, the voice and language, which were more fitted for a *salon* than for the wilderness, was as strange as it was interesting. In her present surroundings she was like a pearl in a ditch. Her clothing, though shabby from hard usage and nondescript in both cut and colour, fitted her with such a nicety that her lithe limbs and perfect proportions were well in evidence. At a distance she might have stood for a model Indian girl, as her short skirts, leggings, and moccasined feet savoured more of savagery than of civilization.

I was taken aback by her answer, yet not ill pleased with it, though she, God bless her, thinking perhaps she had offended or hurt me, let heaven loose in her smile as she said :

“ What a world this would be, m’sieur, if all contention was only on who should be the most generous ! ”

I made no answer as I took the hand she held out to me, nor for the life of me could I resist lifting it to my lips. The girl made no demur, only looking

Through the French Camp

squarely into my eyes, as though to be sure that she was not being made the victim of flippancy; then she slowly drew her fingers from mine, and, turning, walked to where her brother was standing.

It was a strange time and place for even this slight love-passage, but that accepted salute glorified the poor log cabin until, in my eyes, it glowed with the splendour of a palace.

CHAPTER XXXIII

WE START

As the sun went down and the blanket of night drew its fringe over the earth we made ready for what I hoped would be the last act in the drama in which I had played a leading part. Beyond the fact that there was a line of boats drawn up on the shore a rifle-shot from the house, we knew nothing save that our own was among them. We had not thought of the necessity for strategy in obtaining one, for during the day there had been no special sentry set over them; but now, as we came on to the knoll that had hidden the landing-place, it was discovered that a great fire had been built on the beach, it being as much a signal to late arrivals as a means of lighting the beat of the two soldiers who, with shouldered muskets, now patrolled the outer ends of the flotilla to guard it from the depredations of Indian thieves, for here a boat bore the same value to man as does his camel in the desert; it was a vital necessity. This changed the smoothness of our going, brought us to a halt, and set the voyageur at his wits' end for a moment, but for a moment only. He turned to me and whispered:

"'Tis the last throw, lad. Ye be a French officer with the pass-word; go forward an' demand a canoe, then fetch it hither along shore."

"I know little of French officers," I returned; "but I'll warrant they are not given to canoe rides at night and alone. I would surely be suspected."

We Start

“Faith, ye need neither be alone nor lack an excuse for going—an excuse that will shout at them. Take Jessie along. She can play the sweetheart, an’ a moonlight paddle is not off the books even for a French officer. Ye can be opposite the house with a boat in a twinkle. I see no other way, an’ time is scant.”

Even while I saw the ingenuity of the scheme, it was dangerous if there should be a flaw in the watchword; and my heart failed as I thought of the risk to the girl, for I had looked forward to nothing like this. But it was the girl herself who settled the matter, for, as I hesitated, she said:

“I see it. It is all that can be done, and will save a deal of trouble, m’sieur. We can deceive others if not ourselves; we have been brother and sister long enough.”

She spoke as calmly as though the doing was as easy as the saying—her part as something of no consequence—and the inevitable m’sieur slipped from her lips as coolly as though I was a stranger. I wonder that I considered this at that time, but despite the conditions, and coming on top of my late salute, her indifference chilled me. However, there was no time for much consideration on that or any subject. To act had become necessary, for the house we had left might be entered at any moment and the prisoner set free. We were in a mighty ticklish position.

As though taking obedience for granted, and without further argument, Spaulding picked up the luggage and started back towards the house, and through the gathering darkness I could hear the two rifles he carried on his shoulder clank with each stride he took. Then I stepped to the girl’s side, and, taking her hand in mine, rather hesitatingly slipped my arm about her slender waist, and together we went forward in true lovers’ fashion.

The Strength of the Weak

It might have been acting with her—it probably was; but it was real enough with me. From where we started to the nearest end of the black line of boats it was something over a hundred paces; and I will never forget that walk nor my feelings during it, no, not if I live to be a thousand. May God give me grace, but ere we had gone ten paces my fear of the sentinel dwindled into nothing compared to the fear I had of insulting the girl's trust in me by clasping her in my arms and kissing her there and then. She did not shrink from me in the least. Her hand lay in mine as lightly as a rose-leaf. Her unfettered body yielded under the pressure of my arm, and the warmth of it, together with its elastic undulations, turned the blood in my veins to fire; and by this I know that love is the world's motive power, being even stronger than the fear of death.

We walked slowly as we must needs have done to carry out the deceit, but even with lagging and the shortness of the distance, it came to an end too soon. Not a word did either speak, and only once did Jessie look up at me; but then she evidently saw something in my eye that was new to her, for the little reassuring smile on her lips died like magic, her head went down, and a quiver swept through her, though not a motion to draw away from me did she make. Oh, the love of lovers! Oh, the passion of purity! Could you but know what you miss, you who have only the passion of sin! What a blind fool I was that night, but "*si la jeunesse savait.*"

There was everything in the prospect to feed the spirit of romance in which I now seemed steeped. The black bat-wing of danger hanging over me gave zest to the moment, and not for an instant did it blind me to the beauty about us. There was a wonderful effect in the distant fire-lit camp and the dark figures that moved

We Start

against the blaze, the leaping fire we were nearing, and the deep shadows around us. At our right lay the waters of Champlain, the last of the reflected light from the sky still clinging to it. The moon, which was near its rising, gave a warm hint of its coming in the east, its blush making a fiery radiance on the horizon as though a great conflagration raged in the distance. The frogs and tree-toads piped a roundelay, but their concert seemed to accentuate the otherwise universal calm and silence. It was one of those moments that stand out forever in a man's life, which cling to him like the memory of a lost love.

Hand in hand we approached the guard, and I was for walking past, as though unconscious of his presence, but was brought to a halt by his challenge of "*Qui vive?*" I looked for no salute from him, for it was now far past sunset, and not until that moment did I make up my mind how to act. It came to me with considerable force that if a slip occurred at this juncture I was lost indeed, for being in a French uniform I was disguised, and as an English spy my shift would be a short one if I was discovered and taken.

Quickly disengaging myself from the girl I stepped boldly up to the fellow who had challenged me and who had shifted his musket to *armes à portée*, and said:

"My man, I wish my canoe; where can I find it?"

He looked at me from head to foot, then his eye turned to the girl, but in the flicker of the fire he saw nothing more than what to him was an officer and his light o' love. Though this was what I had hoped for, I could have struck him in the face for the thought I knew he held in his brain.

"M'sieur le capitaine is irregular. I cannot pass him."

"*Bon Dieu!*" I exclaimed, speaking to the girl, as

The Strength of the Weak

though surprised. "I had forgotten that we intended going beyond the lines. What are your orders?" I asked, returning my attention to the sentinel.

"None beyond the regular duty, *mon capitaine*."

"And you wish the word?"

"Yes, *mon capitaine*."

I stepped and whispered in his ear, "St. James."

"You are going, not coming; the parole, *m'sieur capitaine*."

With the same show of caution, I gave him the word "July," at which he at once shifted his musket across his shoulder, and returned:

"Correct, but I know nothing of the captain's canoe. If it is but for a time, he can make his own selection; it is no affair of mine." And with this discharge of his duty, the soldier continued his walk.

With a mighty relief from the strain I had not been conscious of until it was over, and with no liking to lose time in finding our own boat, I went straight for the first large canoe of which I caught sight. It was of regulation Indian make, and throwing into it a couple of extra paddles from the one beside it, I handed the girl aboard the frail craft, pushed from the land, and made my way along the shore.

I was fairly elated at the smoothness with which the deception had worked, and blessed Meltonne for the confidence he had placed in me and without which we would have been in a sorry plight. But in a few moments I found that I had been whistling while still in the depth of the wood, for as we floated quietly along shore and had come opposite the house that was now plainly visible in the light of the moon, which by this had topped the eastern hills, Spaulding broke through the bushes, wading knee-deep into the lake. He laid the arms in the bottom of the canoe as I shot it alongside of him, but, instead of returning for the provisions,

We Start

which were still ashore, he drew himself in with such haste as to nearly capsize the craft, and, in a fierce whisper, exclaimed:

“ Make off! Make off! The devil is here at last! Mind the Abnakis!”

I turned and looked over my shoulder as the light bark canoe shot from the land, and in the radiance of the moon could distinguish a man running from the cabin to the beach, and by his motion I had no need to be told his name. As he drew to the water's edge the voyageur dropped his paddle with an oath, and reaching for his rifle, threw it to his shoulder and fired at the shadowy form. The echo of the cracking report was answered by a yell of derision, a cry that could only come from a savage, and then a spurt of flame shot from the bushes, and a rifle-ball hit the boat somewhere, for I could hear the faint spat of the bullet as it passed through. Then I saw the figure of the Abnakis running back to the house. In the distance I heard the guard fire his musket. There was an answering shout, and in half a minute more there came faintly over the water the roll of a drum beating a call, but presently all noise was lost to us as we swept out on the broad waters of the lake. For a space nothing was said as we put all our breath and strength into our paddles. Never had the little vessel gone at that rate under two men only, and presently, on looking back towards the land, which had become a black mass without detail, I found that Jessie had taken a paddle, and was working with the long, easy, sweeping stroke that told how familiar she was in the art of handling a canoe. Presently the boat was headed down the lake, and shortly after Spaulding turned in towards the shore we had left.

“ We cannot go on this way,” he said. “ It is a scant ten miles to Carillon, an' we must throw them off the track, for there the lake ends. We will have to trust

The Strength of the Weak

to the woods an' the Almighty to get ourselves into Saint Sacrement."

Little I cared where we went or how. We were free from the camp, and water left no tracks, and so I told him. His answer was not reassuring.

"Aye, we have gotten away," he replied; "but it was not the slick leaving I hoped for. It happened that while I was looking for ye, going down the shore to see ye a bit better, I left all but the arms an' such behind me on the bank. When I was returning, arter catching sight o' ye, I saw the Abnakis had come up as though he had risen from the ground, an' he was standing over the packs I had left. I slunk into the bushes, afraid even to draw our fire-arms apart and make a try at him, an' I was in mortal terror that ye would come up ere he left. I think he smelled out the whole matter, for he turned an' ran to the house in time to meet the count, who was coming along with two others. I knew him by the white bandage on his head. I took no chances, lad, an' came aboard. Ye see what a tight squeak it was, and, what is something to the purpose, we have not a mouthful with us. We have naught but powder and bullets, and dare not fire a shot at game if it galloped about us an' we were starving."

I conceived that the lack of food might put us to some inconvenience, but did not catch the full signification of his last words. I could not realize that one might starve in the wilderness though well armed; that the red deer might be in full view and graze or drink unmolested; that the partridge might whirr or drum in safety; in short, that while a man is being hunted he cannot turn hunter without inviting destruction on himself. At that time excitement had taken the place of sustenance with me, and I was buoyed to a pitch that made the lack of food a matter of small moment. All I thought of was to drive ahead and put as much space

We Start

betwixt ourselves and the French camp as was possible.

And drive ahead we did, now but a little more than a rifle-shot from shore. The birchen bark slid over the water as though under sail, and that, too, with half the exertion it had taken to move the heavy bateau. The broad moon swung in a cloudless sky. The wind, never strong, rippled a path of gold that stretched to the opposite shore, for now the lake was growing narrower with each mile we went. The rolling billows of dark woods looked deeply mysterious, and the only sound I heard for an hour or more was the heavy breathing of the girl behind me as she laboured at the paddle, the sucking swirl caused by our strokes, and the metallic tinkle of the water as the drops fell from our cutting prow. It must have been near ten o'clock by the time the shores on the lake closed in and we saw Fort Carillon lift on the point ahead, the skyline of the half-finished works proclaiming its character. Here we ceased paddling, as much to rest as for consultation. And right glad I was for the rest, being wet with perspiration, and in the moonlight I could see the dew of labour on the sweet face of the girl as she returned my questioning look with a smile undismayed and wonderful at such a time. Her quiet and seeming confidence was to me a fillip—a stimulant beside which wine is but as water.

If one will look at a map of the north country it will be seen that the noble expanse of Lake Champlain narrows at its southern end until it becomes insignificant as a sheet of water, and at Ticonderoga it is barely a pistol-shot from shore to shore. Here the influx of water comes from two sources—one arm, that from Wood Creek and South Bay, entering almost straight from the south; the other, draining Lac Saint Sacrement, or Lake George, coming in from the west after turning from its northward course. Even in times of peace

The Strength of the Weak

this latter stream will not permit of direct communication between the two beautiful lakes, it being broken by shallow rapids for half its length. The route of the portage, or "carry," thus made necessary is commanded by the fort for its entire distance. The South Bay arm of Champlain, widening and narrowing throughout its course, flows in the midst of a paradise and drains what was then known as the Drowned Lands, a series of ponds and swamps far south of its confluence with the lake, its general trend being parallel with, though it is some distance from, Saint Sacrement.

It is by this water-way, and not by Lake George, that all the great armies of invasion have moved from Canada into the valley of the Hudson, and it appeared to be the logical route for us, as now we were obliged to push south at all hazards, our first destination being Albany, the most northerly post of civilization on the river. This way to the English settlements seemed to be the only one left open to us, the Saint Sacrement route being blocked by the rapids and the road around them probably alive with hostiles. The land between the two streams might, indeed, be crossed, and the canoe launched upon the lower lake, but it would mean the transportation of the boat over a mountain. This rough and almost impassable country forms a natural bulwark to Ticonderoga from the south, and even to-day it seems deserted by man, so rugged is its hidden face, so infested by reptiles its woods, that smile and rustle as though naught but innocence rested beneath their shade, so tangled its thickets, so obscure its paths. This way, besides being impracticable from its difficulty, would be extremely dangerous as well, for it would take us close to the savages who swarmed along the "carry," and though Spaulding mentioned it as a possible way out, neither of us considered it seriously. The voyageur was for recrossing the lake, carrying the

We Start

canoe past the fort, and relaunching it at the foot of South Bay, risking that shore being guarded. He was explaining the advantage gained by so doing, when he suddenly ceased his whispering and pointed up the track of moonlight that sparkled along the face of the water. There was little I could see save something like a speck drifting over the glimmer, but his laconic though forcible "Injuns" put new life into me as I realized that if we continued where we were it would mean certain discovery when the coming boat arrived abreast of us. With common consent we fell to with the paddles, and once more were flying along, though whether seen or not we had no way of knowing. I thanked God that to them we were out of the moon-track, and that whichever course we took there would be but little farther to go, for the pace was too great and the strain too severe to be long continued. All considerations of ways and means were lost in the one stern fact that we must now run by the point ahead. Straight towards the fort we went and into what suddenly appeared to be a veritable *cul-de-sac*, for as we came abreast of the works, to our consternation, clear in the moonlight we saw a dark line drawn across the mouth of the waters we had hoped to enter. Not until long after did I know the nature of the obstruction, but it proved to be a formidable mass of logs chained together, and did for this arm of Champlain what Nature, in the shape of rapids, had done for the western stream. We were blocked in all directions. Even the girl gave a low exclamation as she saw the veritable trap we had entered. If the night had been dark, in our desperation we might have dragged the boat over the floating dam that barred our way, for it was of no great width; but under the bright moon such a course would have been suicidal, for a watch-fire on either bank showed how carefully the structure was guarded.

The Strength of the Weak

As yet there had been no indication that we had been seen by those behind, and we might have turned back without interruption had the night been moonless or the watch on the point less strict; but as it was we received a hail, and immediately thereafter a shot from a musket, though the ball went wide of us. There could be no halt for us, and as the voyageur saw we were marked he whispered:

"Head for the eastern shore an' drive on. We must trick them. 'Tis a chance for wit an' coolness."

Doubtless the sentry thought we had been frightened by the shot as he saw us turn and make for the opposite shore. I could hear his steel ramrod ring on his musket as he started to reload, and his hail was as plain as it came over the water as though he was but a few paces away. We were beyond his ken in a moment, and ran the canoe aground in a mass of black bushes. Passing me the guns and ammunition, without which we might as well have sunk ourselves in the lake, Spaulding lifted the light boat, and, shifting it to his head, hurried along the shore, the girl and I following. Not until he came to a ledge of rock that ran into the water did he stop; then he launched the canoe again, and as we once more embarked in the shadow of the land I heard another cry and another shot from the point we had now passed.

"Thank God for that Frenchman's eyes!" said the voyageur; "he will halt those coming up an' tell them we have gone to cover."

"What now and where to?" I asked, as I seated myself and tried to keep the tremor out of my voice.

"Straight ahead for the land o' difficulty," he answered. "'Tis a desperate hope, but the only one. They may think we landed to make a carry around yon obstruction, an' they won't find the mistake until 'tis

We Start

light enough to take up the trail. By then, God willing, we will be far on our way."

We shot out of the shadow and into the triangle of clear water, and each moment I feared a fresh hail, though, as it happened, we were not discovered. Within five minutes we were ashore again under the black shadow of a mass of trees that came to the water's edge, and here we breathed freely, for at first not a sound came to us. But presently the peace of the night was broken by a loud and long cry that told its story to the voyageur, though it meant no more to me than a chill at the thought of what we had escaped.

"They have found our landing yonder, as I hoped they would," said Spaulding, speaking aloud for the first time. "I fear the Abnakis is among them, but the Lord knows I hope not."

CHAPTER XXXIV

SOUTHWARD

I MIGHT write page after page of minute details of our flight during the next three days, but it would simply be a chronicle of minor disasters and awaken a train of memory I can well enough dispense with. It is like a nightmare, as I look back at it, a time of pain, not acute, perhaps, but a grinding, hopeless, mental pain like that which comes with low delirium. For three days not a mouthful of proper food passed our lips (though there was no lack of water), and at the end of that time, when we at last looked down upon the face of Lac Saint Sacrement, we were a hapless and well-nigh a hopeless trio. But the spark of life glowed strongly, and needed but a slight fanning at the hands of good fortune to blaze right merrily once more, and our love of liberty was not a whit slackened.

The canoe was gone. With infinite labour and no little engineering we had lifted it up steep ravines, wormed it through thickets almost impenetrable, carried it up boiling water-courses where no other path was possible, and finally saw it smashed at the bottom of a steep declivity. It had fallen while I was under it, and precious near I had been to following. Though it meant much to us, I think we all breathed freer when it was off our hands and seen to be past repair.

We were in rags, for brush and brier had had their way with us; we were footsore and faint and weary, but to me the sight of new waters was like the breath of

Southward

life, albeit we then had no boat to launch upon the bosom of the lake, and were still sixty odd miles from our destined point of Albany. Our sustenance had been roots and such wild berries as had fallen in our way. Of fire or proper food we had known nothing, since the first we dared not kindle even had there been anything to cook, and as for the latter, though game was plentiful the first day, we dared not fire a gun.

For at no time were we more than a mile from the track of the "carry," and in that region every man's hand was against us. We had not been followed, for the trick the voyageur had played on our pursuers (if they had been our pursuers) and a heavy shower which washed the trail made our whereabouts a mystery to our enemies. It is not probable they dreamed we would attempt a portage across a mountain. Twice we had approached the lowlands near the regular "carry," and the land was alive with savages, for it was here that the red allies of the French under De St. Pierre had finally been gathered, and at night innumerable fires could be seen in the distance where the woods opened. We had feared, and still feared, being stumbled upon by some chance hunting party, but as yet it had not happened, our good fortune probably being due to the fact that France fed her hirelings well, and the savage, for all his activity, is lazy when he can afford to be, preferring to lie in the sun and draw rations rather than waste his strength and powder in the chase.

I have said that the disasters that overtook us were minor, and so they proved to be in the light of subsequent events, though at the time each one looked to be insurmountable. We might have accomplished the distance in a day at most had it not been for the boat, for in a straight line it is not more than five miles from lake to lake. But light though it had been, the boat had handicapped us terribly, and it was not abandoned un-

The Strength of the Weak

til we were almost across the isthmus. This was misfortune enough, though it was almost nothing to that immediately following, for on the third day the girl had made a misstep and so twisted her ankle that it soon became impossible for her to walk. For the last mile Spaulding had stumbled through the woods with his sister in his arms, a precious burden, and one from which I would willingly have relieved him.

In this fashion we came to a sight of the lake, looking out upon the "Smile of the Great Spirit,"* as the children of Israel looked out upon the Promised Land. It lay on the lap of earth like an oblong turquoise, the array of giant hills about it seeming to stand guard over its serene beauty. Save for a thin line of smoke that arose from a point below us, there was not a sign of human life within the ken of our sweeping vision. The shores and hills beyond, rich with their billows of green, fell away, fold on fold, like waves of the ocean, until the distance veiled the colour in a tender blue. The sun had gone from the lowlands and the clouds were growing rosy, though broad day still lay over the earth.

For all that I saw the beauty of the prospect (and its influence fell on me like the touch of a gentle hand) I had no eye for keen admiration at that time. I write of something that comes back to me like a tune heard long ago. Physical discomfort, anxiety, or a feeling mightily like fear for the future, held me in a grip not easily loosened, and scant encouragement I got from the voyageur. He laid his sister on the grass as we stepped into the open, drawing his great figure up slowly, like one whose strength had been overtaxed. As he shaded his eyes and viewed the expanse before us, he said:

* One of the many Indian names for Lake George.

Southward

"I know not why we came forward, save that it was harder to go back, an' now forward we must go—but where? What a fair hell is this to look upon!" He waved his hand comprehensively over the prospect, and, pointing to the thin coil of smoke, continued: "There lies an Indian nest, and in it there is doubtless that which would comfort us. My heart sinks at the thought of another day of this life—or this walking death—an' Jessie will not hold out."

His air of utter dejection was more depressing to me than my own empty stomach. What would become of us if Spaulding failed. I left him standing there and went to the side of his sister, whose face bore a weary look. Never a murmur had she made from first to last; not even had she given way to mock heroics or insisted on her uselessness and dependence, or made a bid for encouragement when we had none to give her. She had never complained of hunger, though I knew that hunger galled her. She had never complained of pain, though the way the small instep swelled and the setting of her white teeth in her nether lip told the story of her suffering louder than words could have done. There had been no "m'sieur" from her lips of late; indeed, nothing, for that matter, for she rarely spoke without being spoken to, and for the past hour she had been silent, her head lying on her brother's arm listlessly enough, her eyes fast closed.

As I stepped to her side I noticed the unusual pallor of her cheeks, and in a moment discovered her to be unconscious. I called the voyageur. He looked at her with great distress on his pinched face, then fell to rubbing her hands.

"She has but fainted, lad. Clean spent from pain an' want o' food." He bit his lip, and then jumped to his feet. "Is the devil from hell walking up an' down the arth that the innocent starve in the world the Almighty

The Strength of the Weak

gave each a share of? What have we done to deserve this?"

He spoke loud and with sudden vehemence, as though goaded beyond endurance, then strode to where I had placed his rifle against a tree. "My God," he continued, "we might rub her bones bare, but 'twould be naught to the purpose! Give her water, my son. She will come to ere long. Care for her if ye have it in ye to care for me. I am going below for food; it must be done, an' may the angels go with me. It is eat or die."

He spoke rapidly, as though in fear of opposition, and bending over the girl kissed her pallid lips. It was the first caress I had ever seen him give her. Then he held out his hand to me. "I hope to be back, lad," he said, as he shook my hand; "an' if I fail to turn up by daybreak ye had better follow after if ye have the strength left to do it. We might as well surrender to the French as to death, though, God willin', it may not come to either." He stooped to the girl again, and, with a low "God save ye both," walked into the forest.

Since the day Cadet and De Mantel stepped into my house I had not felt more depressed than at that moment when I saw Spaulding disappear, and Heaven knows I had been in the depths before. Here was I again alone with the girl, but now with but barely a hope to look to. The maiden lay like a corpse at my side. The faint, sweet smell of the damp forest came to my nostrils with the cooling of the air; the birds, homing for the coming night, bubbled out their last song to the waning day; and the clouds, brilliant with the glory of the sunset, hung like great palettes of colour in the softening sky. The shadows of a black night would soon be over us, and the only grain of comfort that could be gathered in my distress was that the weather had set fair and the air was warm. It was small

Southward

consolation. I think I prayed then, just as a man will do as a last resort, forgetting that if prayer could be of use in his extremity, it might have saved him from getting into it. When I had poured out my supplication, than which none was ever uttered with more heart, though perhaps the faith was lacking, I sat myself against the tree with a shade less panic in my brain. I could not guess what Spaulding might do, but I knew he was worked to a pitch of desperation that would give him strength and that would bode no good to those who opposed him. A starving man will do much for food. At that time I would have risked a shot had game hove in sight, but we had seen none during that day, and I was far too weak to seek it at a distance, even had it been earlier and I willing to leave the unconscious girl.

I did all I could for the maiden, but that was little. After bathing her temples with water from the spring near which we had stopped, I chafed her hands and waited, and by-and-bye, with a shiver, she opened her eyes. As she saw me she tried to smile—a poor, wan smile it was; then, with another shiver, she closed her eyes again. I took off the remains of my coat, which was solid enough barring its frayed skirts, and wrapped its tarnished glory about her shoulders. I then shifted her poor foot to an easier position, and finally took her head on my knee that she might rest with some comfort.

And there I sat, afraid to move lest I break the sleep she seemed to have fallen into. Asleep I finally went myself from sheer weakness, and when I woke I was chilled to the bone and as stiff as the bole of the tree against which I leaned. It was black darkness all about. Far away I heard the cry of a wolf, and to this day I wonder why we had not been traced by them and forced to fight for more than mere freedom.

The girl lay as I had last seen her, but when I moved,

The Strength of the Weak

and groaned from the pain of doing it, she awoke and pulled herself upright.

"Who is it?" she whispered.

"I am here," I replied.

"Where is Leonard?"

I was obliged to confess I did not know, nor could I tell her how long he had been gone. She fell into no panic, as I was afraid she would, but whispered that she was better and felt neither pain nor hunger, and could walk if put to it. My heart sank at this, for in her words I thought I marked the wandering brain that comes with starvation; but she carried it no further, for, like a tired child, she drew close to me, and, feeling for my hand, nestled against me like the innocent angel she was.

Thus we sat like the babes in the wood, and well-nigh as helpless. My arm was around her and her head fell to my shoulder, her easy breathing showing that she slept again. But I did not sleep. I watched and waited, and wondered at the warmth that stole through me. That this girl and I were to live for one another or that I was to die for her I became firmly assured, and the thought drove physical suffering to the winds. I claimed her then as my own, and only wished for an opportunity to assert my claim.

Slowly it drew towards day, and a livid, unearthly light penetrated the woods. I had made up my mind not to go the length of delivering myself into captivity for the sake of food, not until I had made a bid for it, at least. I would shoot at game at the first opportunity, kindle a fire and cook it, come what might, and if I was then undiscovered I would search for the voyageur with renewed strength. This would be better than giving up tamely. As I put the maiden gently away from me, she woke and looked about in a dazed sort of a way, as though grappling with memory; then she noticed the coat about her shoulders. With a re-

Southward

proachful look and a quick movement she pulled the garment from her and held it out to me, her first words dispelling my recent dream.

"M'sieur, you did very wrong to rob yourself of this. You need it more than I. Still, I am obliged to you. Where is my brother?"

"Leonard has not returned," I answered; "and as for the coat, mademoiselle, it is the least you have robbed me of."

Her poor, wan face looked ghostlike in the pallid light as she tried to pierce through the gloom that still hung in the depths of the forest, then she asked:

"Has there been no shot?"

"No."

"What are you going to do?"

I took my rifle and threw the powder-horn over my shoulder before answering, then I told her what her brother had intended doing and his instructions for us to surrender ourselves. I also told her of my determination first to seek game. I firmly believed that the voyageur had been either captured or killed, though at the latter possibility I only hinted. Her great eyes grew wide and her face a little wild as she said:

"And do you intend to leave me here?"

I nodded. She struggled to her knees and held out both hands in appeal.

"No, no; you cannot leave me alone—you must not! I will go with you anywhere; I will not be in your way; see, I can walk."

She got to her feet, but collapsed with a groan as she tried her weight on her wounded foot, sinking to the ground like a crippled bird. The tears fairly came to my eyes as I marked her utter helplessness and the pitiful look that came over her face. I was fairly beside myself at this appearance of abject misery, and it seemed to be gross cruelty to leave her, though it would

The Strength of the Weak

be scant charity to stay until, through starvation, our natural forces should have given out. I was torn betwixt my love for her and my duty to us both, and at this juncture words would have been of no avail, so I wasted none. Physically I was weak enough, but my strength of purpose assisted my remaining strength of body, and, slinging my rifle across my back, I stooped over the maiden and lifted her in my arms. She made no protest by word, neither did she struggle to free herself, though that she was not in full accord with the spirit that moved me was shown when she buried her face in her hands and burst into tears. Through all her trials I had never known her to weep before—never since, as a child, she had clung to me—and this touch of femininity was doubtless a relief to her, albeit her sobs shook me deeply. I could give her no word of comfort, and so wisely held my tongue, feeling that an apology for my action, necessary though it was, would only gall her sensibility.

With a somewhat tottering step I hurried to where I had seen the voyageur disappear the evening before, and with no more definite purpose than to get to the lake, where, perchance, I might sight game of some sort, I made my way along the edge of the silent forest—silent save for the birds which had awakened to greet the coming day. The future was as colourless as the faintly glimmering sheet of water that once in a while showed through the trees. The morning star hung over it like a jewel—a star of hope—and earlier I might have been lifted by the thought, though now I had come to recognise hope as a lottery containing many more blanks than prizes.

When I had gone a quarter of a mile, and had become so weary that I could carry the girl no farther, and was casting about for a place to deposit her now limp and silent form; when my spirits were at their

Southward

lowest and the last spark of a forlorn hope was flickering to its total extinguishment ; when I had reached the extremity where fear sinks into indifference, then we were rescued, and in a way natural enough, though at the time it seemed nothing short of a miracle to me.

CHAPTER XXXV

A RESPITE

I HAD chosen the ground easiest to travel, and had at last come upon a dense thicket which appeared to bar the way, as through it I could not have forced a path, when from a little beyond its edge I heard a crackling as though some large animal—a deer, I thought—was breaking its way towards the opening. The air was absolutely still, and no rustle of leaves marred the character of the sound. Hastily placing the girl behind a tree, I unslung my rifle and sank to my knee in the shelter of a bush; aye, I had placed my finger on the trigger and sighted at the spot whence the sound was coming, when, to my surprise, two men broke through the undergrowth. At a glance I saw they were not Indians. As they struck the more open timber they stopped and looked about them, as though at a loss which way to go. Then the taller of the two spoke, and my heart leaped as I heard his speech was English.

“Where now, Jager? I care not to linger long about here, an’ ’tis like looking for a ball shot at random.”

Without a thought of consequences, I got to my feet and stepped from behind the screen of bushes, my knees smiting each other from weakness and excitement. As I did so, like a flash I was covered by the rifles of the two, at which I tried to cry aloud, but my tongue only clicked in my dry mouth, and I threw up both hands,

A Respite

in token of surrender. They must have soon noticed my condition, though to me it seemed that I stood there an infinite time; but finally they lowered their pieces and both came towards me.

"By the Lord!" said the first. "I take it we have struck the quarry. Do ye call yerself Chatsworth?"

"Yes. Who are you?"

"Where's the maiden?" he asked abruptly, ignoring my question.

With neither fear nor suspicion, I pointed to the tree beside which lay the motionless figure of the girl. At that he left me, and bending over her lifted her, as though her weight was nothing; then he strode back, and said:

"Follow after me, sir. Ye need have no fear; we were sent to fetch ye; yer friend is below. Jager, give him a sup o' liquor—he looks about to faint. The girl is clean gone, I see. Easy, now."

I grasped the leather flask held out to me as though it contained the elixir of life, and, indeed, for a time it had that effect, for when the fire of the drink began to chase through my brain I seemed to wake and realize, without being told, that Spaulding had stumbled upon friends instead of enemies, and had sent a rescue party after us. It was as sudden as though we had been picked up by the hand of the Lord, and the older I grow the more I think there is less in luck than in love, and the hand of the Father it was that lifted us. I was ready to shout from the very joy of deliverance, but it is well I did not, for ere we were half-way down the mountain the leader stopped.

"I think it unwise to follow back on our trail," he said; "it may have been crossed thus early. Was it not hereabouts ye saw the Montagnais?"

"'Twas farther west an' lower that I killed him," answered the man called Jager.

The Strength of the Weak

“ Well, you two tarry a bit. Cover my lead in the rear and follow in ten minutes.”

He spoke rapidly, like one in authority, his keen, black eyes—so black that pupil and iris were as one—snapping in the growing light; then he turned aside with the unconscious maiden, while Jager and I stepped into the bushes and waited.

“ Who is he? ” I asked.

The man looked down on me with a mixture of pity and scorn in the smile that showed his tobacco-stained teeth.

“ ’Tis Colonel Rogers, mister. Where was ye borned? ”

“ *Colonel Rogers!* ” I exclaimed, unable to associate that military office with a man dressed like a *courcour-de-bois*. “ Where is his regiment? ”

Before answering my companion spat a fine line of tobacco-juice through his teeth, hitting the leaf he aimed at, gave his quid two or three crunches, and spoke with feeling.

“ They tell me ye be a French signor, but ye talk an’ act uncommon like a human. I take it ye ha’ never heard o’ Rogers an’ his rangers. Well, ye may some day, an ye live. I dunno about bein’ called part o’ a riggiment, but mayhap I be—mayhap I be. Ye probably meant no offence. Keep quiet now.”

I suddenly remembered having heard Spaulding tell the imprisoned officer that Rogers’s Rangers had beset the house, but I had not known what he meant, nor at this time had that celebrated band exploited themselves and become famous. I was not offended at the slur directed to myself or at the peremptory command to keep quiet. Betwixt the contrast of utter dejection and sudden hope, betwixt starvation and weakness and the false stimulation of raw liquor on an empty stomach, I felt too much like a child to assert a spirit of my own,

A Respite

and so obeyed the behest, and sat looking at the character before me, well assured that whatever else might be we had not fallen into the hands of Philistines.

The man was of the woods from his coon-skin head-piece to his deer-skin moccasins. Save for woollen stockings, the tops of which were displayed about his thin ankles, he was clad entirely in dressed deer-skin, and his tall frame was so spare that, as he leaned against the tree at the foot of which I had seated myself, his hip-bones were clearly indicated through the greasy buck-skin that covered them. Of stomach, he seemed to have none. His eyes were small and light blue, and never for a moment were they still. Through the dim perspective of the forest, near the edge of which we rested, in all directions he darted his gaze, his lean jaw working slowly on his quid, his gnarled and vein-corded hand beating a noiseless tattoo on the protruding handle of the knife in his belt. Presently he broke the silence.

"We'll start on, squire, an' don't ye stray from my side, for if Polly sees ye alone an' in that rig he'll take ye for Deeskaw's army an' put a sudden stop to ye." This, like all his speech, was said in a voice that could not have been heard ten feet away, though every word was clear.

I had no idea who Polly might be, but I knew he referred to the strange appearance I made, for what with the woods and the weather Péan's uniform was half in shreds and the chapeau minus every decoration, although there could be no mistaking my costume for anything but the hardly used dress of a French officer. We started down the mountain, but had not gone ten steps ere my guide turned to me, and, pointing at the sword, which gave a clank every step or two, he said:

"Do something with that d——n thing, that it may not signal our going."

I humbly obeyed him, and held the weapon in my

The Strength of the Weak

hand as I walked or slid and scrambled behind him, and in something like twenty minutes we were on the margin of the lake and near the encampment. But it could hardly have been called an encampment, for not a sign of camp equipage did I see save a tin pot set on the glowing coals of a half-burned-out fire, by the side of which sat Spaulding bending over Jessie, who, now conscious, lay on the ground at his side. Opposite him stood Colonel Rogers.

A few moments later, while I was eating cold venison and drinking great draughts of what was called coffee, though the flavour was remote from the genuine, I heard the story of our rescue. It was simply that Rogers, with two picked men, had come up the lake at the command of Johnson on a reconnaissance against the French. For three days they had scouted about the foot of the lake, but had found the Indians too thick south of the fort to allow of an approach to Carillon. Had it not been for our unexpected advent the party would have been obliged to return as wise regarding the movements and condition of the French as when they came, but the information we furnished them, and which pointed to the early advance of the enemy, was all they desired. From them we learned that Johnson had moved up from Albany, and on the head waters of the Hudson had built a fort, but by this time he might be at Saint Sacrement. In his desperation the evening before, Spaulding had walked boldly into camp, after having narrowly escaped being shot by Jager. He told his story to Rogers, who at first feared his strange visitor was trying to lead him into an ambuscade; but by showing my mother's letter to Johnson, the voyageur soon convinced the colonel that he was speaking the truth, and at the first streak of dawn Rogers and the man Jager had started after us.

"From what ye tell me," said the commander, "it

A Respite

must be that Dieskau is about to steal a march on Johnson. It is news that must not stale in waiting. Jager, call in the half-breed. We cannot hang about until night, but will go at once. How's the lass?"

But the girl, who was now sitting up, answered for herself. She was wan enough, but there was a look of unalloyed content on her face as she leaned against a tree and ate the food that had been spread before us while her brother put a fresh binding on her ankle.

The fire was no more than a bed of hot coals by this, giving out no smoke. An early breeze had begun to ruffle the lake and shake the leaves of the trees. It was not yet broad day, though the clouds, high against a beautiful sky, were pearly in the strength of the coming sun. It was so perfect, this calm after the storm of misfortune, I thought that surely a period had been put to our troubles. The coming of Johnson to Saint Sacrement would save us many miles of forest travel. The obstruction at the mouth of Wood Creek which had forced us overland had proved a blessing, though it had looked otherwise when we came upon it, and now we had food, a force to guard us, and water carriage that would at least take us into friendly territory. The black past was all a dream now; our sufferings had been a figment of the brain, and already, though with the marks of our journey still felt and still shown, I thought of our recent trials as all humanity thinks of misfortune and sickness once they are past—they have gone forever.

The hour advanced; the man Jager had not returned from his errand, and Rogers was walking up and down in evident impatience. I was content enough. It was such a relief to feel the effects of food, to see the brightening face of Jessie, and hear something of the old resonance in the voice of her brother as he assured her that with the going of the night had gone her troubles. I lay and listened lazily. I fancied his words prophetic,

The Strength of the Weak

but he had scarce uttered them when through the air came the distant report of a gun.

The sound acted upon Rogers like the clarion of a war trumpet. He stopped in his walk and lifted his head high, as though sniffing the air, his fine, hawk-like profile cut against the water of the lake as clear as a silhouette, his sinewy frame as rigid as a hound at point. He listened intently as the echo of the report rolled from hill to hill, and then he became all animation.

"'Tis the bark of the half-breed's musket. He loads it like a field-piece!" he exclaimed. "Lend a hand here, sir, an' be quick with ye. Man, bring on the girl. Something has happened. I told him not to fire unless forced."

He leaped into the bushes as he spoke, on his way catching up his rifle with one hand and the tin pot with the other, and I hurried after. In ten steps we were at the water's edge, and there, well concealed, lay a canoe like the one I had stolen, only larger and of greater weight. Throwing into it a deer-skin bag that lay near, and depositing on its bottom our arms and the coffee-pot, which he handled as carefully as though it were a precious article (as, indeed, it was), we lifted and launched the vessel. Spaulding coming up with Jessie in his arms placed her amidships, and we all embarked and waited.

But it was not for long, though for a time no unusual sound came to us as we sat and listened, rifles in hand. Presently there was a noise of breaking bushes, and Jager rushed up.

"Where's the half-breed?" demanded Rogers, as the man came into sight.

"Hard behind. Hell's broke loose, I guess, though they be bothered by the parting of the trail," returned Jager, whose lean figure seemed to lengthen six inches

A Respite

as he stretched himself to look over the thicket through which he had come.

“Were ye with him?”

“Aye.”

“What keeps him, then?”

“Scalp,” was the laconic reply.

“Damn him! The Indian in him will put the whole party to risk. Draw him in, we can’t wait here.”

In obedience to this command, Jager lifted his rifle in the air and pulled the trigger, though ere the echo of the report had died the stock of the gun was upon the ground, and he was pouring powder over the bullet that lay in his broad palm. For a moment all listened as the smoke drifted through the trees, then Spaulding said:

“I hear him.”

And heard him he had, though I made out nothing save the chirp of a wren and the soft splash of waves raised by the west wind; but a moment later what to me looked like a full-blooded red-skin appeared before us, leaping as easily as a deer over the bushes that lay between us and the fire we had left. He was hideous under his paint, one half of his face, from the middle of his nose, being a bright vermilion, the other half black. His features were Caucasian in their regularity and proportion, and his hands so fair that he might easily have passed as a white man; indeed, they were fairer than the hands of any of us, the girl’s excepted. In one he held an old flint-lock musket of a pattern ancient even then; in the other, a fresh scalp from which blood was yet dripping. In a voice the modulation of which was perfect, though it possessed the guttural quality of the American aboriginal, he said:

“We must be off, colonel. There be seven—nine; they find the Montagnais; they raise hell. See!”

He lifted the scalp and exhibited it with pride, and though, with a quick glance, he recognised three

The Strength of the Weak

strangers, he paid us no more attention than though we were logs of wood, but stepped into the canoe and picked up a paddle.

"Your cursed thirst for scalps will ruin us some day," said Rogers, as he pushed the canoe clear of the land. "Who are they?"

"One—two, damn Micmac; rest Abnaki, um guess."

"How far?"

"Far 'nough, um guess. See!"

The Indian raised his paddle and pointed to fire clearing some six hundred yards away and to the left of the point we were leaving. Even as he did so I heard a cry that told me we were discovered, though I saw not a savage. The half-breed shrugged his shoulders and showed a magnificent set of teeth as he said:

"Think they catch Polly? Polly no damn fool. Them have no canoe."

"Ah!" said Rogers, with a quick backward glance at the lovely shore. "How know ye that?"

"Me mash heem. Me find one—two canoe; me mash heem both."

"Ye would be wuth yer heft in gold, Polly, if ye would let scalps alone," said Jager, spitting a trail of tobacco-juice into the water.

"You be wuth damn little in heft—gold or anything," answered the half-breed, a blow aimed at the attenuated frame of the other, though that there was no venom in the repartee was shown by the smile that lit the Indian's ferocious countenance and the good-humoured grunt from Jager.

"Sweep on, sweep on!" exclaimed the colonel. "Get out o' gunshot fust, an' then ye can claw. I'm sorry we had to start wi' night so far ahead; it may mean trouble."

But his fears appeared to be without foundation, for we sailed onward hour after hour, and with not an event

A Respite

to mar the peace of our progress and very little conversation to enliven it. The most unsocial of gregarious animals on God's footstool, the most laconic in expression, as though language was a commodity not to be wasted, is the woodsman who passes his time away from his kind. The party of six in the canoe was no exception. After the first small passage at arms between Jager and the half-breed Polly, wit and wisdom seemed to die together. To break the growing monotony I told the story of our travels to Colonel Rogers, who listened intently enough, though his paddle went like a machine and never failed in its stroke, and who, in the end, vouchsafed nothing beyond the passing remark that Johnson would be likely to give me plenty to do if I elected to join him, and that he, the colonel, would fain have an interview with De Mantel on any terms.

It is doubtless true that to some extent the silence that for the most part brooded over us was due to the fact that we were yet in an unsafe position. It would not be too broad a statement to make to say that upon that day there was not another Englishman (save possibly a scout or two) north of Fort Lyman, unless Johnson had by then reached the lake, and that the forest on either of the shores betwixt which we were so peacefully gliding sheltered hundreds of Algonquins, the advance feelers of the French. I do not know this to be true, but subsequent events led me to think so, and I am fairly certain that even then a party of French pioneers had gone ahead, unsuspected by us, and blazed out the path that later was followed by the entire army.

The hot sun smote us from a cloudless sky, its rich effulgence making distant objects startlingly plain. The clearness of the atmosphere served to show us we had not been followed, and the fear gradually died, so far as I was concerned. Our way was slow, owing to the dead weight carried in the canoe, for there were but

The Strength of the Weak

four paddles, at one of which Spaulding and I took turns. We held a course up the middle of the lake, that we might turn to either shore in case of necessity; but the beautiful sheet of water only sparkled in the sun that morning, and on its face nothing appeared more threatening than the waves made by the light wind, and once the splash of a fish-hawk as it swooped for its prey.

But late in the afternoon the aspect of the sky changed, and the wind, veering to the south, blew so strongly that we were forced inshore, though far enough out to be well beyond rifle-shot. We had reached what is now known as the "Narrows," or midway on the lake. The islets that here abound were thick with verdure, and broke the rush of wind, making our progress somewhat easier, but not for long. Notwithstanding the necessity that urged us forward, it finally became impossible to proceed without danger of being swamped, and the colonel determined to camp until the wind fell. We disembarked on an island of not more than an acre in extent, a morsel of land so lovely that it seemed a bit broken from the Garden of Eden, so wild that since the days of its creation it appeared to have rested in its original beauty unaltered by the hand of man, and perhaps untrodden by his foot. There we rested securely enough and undisturbed, save by the tearing of the wind through the miniature forest about us.

CHAPTER XXXVI

BESET

AT dawn, a dawn peaceful enough to harbinger naught but good fortune, we were off again, refreshed by food, refreshed by sleep, and in good spirits on all matters save that of Jessie's foot, which was worse instead of better, having turned a bluish-black. She was as easy in the boat as elsewhere, however, and we started fair and early, but had barely drawn clear of our resting-place when we marked a canoe propelled by a single Indian. It was going rapidly, and its course was diagonal to ours, the savage making to cross our bow and reach the western shore of the lake. Having no fear of one man, and thinking that perchance the savage might be an Iroquois who would give us information as to the whereabouts of his fellows, Rogers directed our course to follow; but no sooner had the stranger scented our desire than he fell to work to outstrip us, though, for all his efforts, we rapidly gained on him. When it became apparent that he would be overhauled ere reaching land, while yet at a distance he stopped all efforts and sat still until we drew alongside, and then I noticed the fellow was fishing, for a line held in his hand hung over the side of the canoe.

"Qua neecheer,"* said the colonel, as, with a backward sweep of his paddle, he brought our canoe to a standstill on the now quiet water and looked at the be-

* How do you do, my brother?

The Strength of the Weak

daubed savage, who, with the stolidity of his race, seemed unaffected by the many eyes directed at him.

"Qua neecheer," was the non-committal reply.

"Does a warrior wear paint when on a peaceful hunt?" asked Rogers, in the dialect usually employed by the whites when communicating with the aborigines, a language understood by all tribes east of Huron and north of Delaware Bay.

"Canteetchee must live," was the calm answer.

"And is he so alone that he hunts by himself? Has he no friends?" asked the colonel, his black eyes seeming to gleam as he scrutinized the stranger and the barren interior of his canoe.

The savage made no reply.

"Whence come ye an' why are ye without as much as a tomahawk while the forest is laced with the tracks of the enemy?" demanded Rogers, letting his paddle fall and taking his rifle from the bottom of the boat, an implied threat that unloosed the lips of the other. With a fine gesture and without a glance at the fire-arm the savage waved his hand towards the south and said:

"The tribe of my fathers is not my tribe; I know not of it. It was of the east and by the big waters. I am from the Great Hill country far south of the marshes; south of the land of the flint. As a child I was of the Penticooks. I have been robbed. I am from the land away from the great valley and towards the setting sun."

"Aye," put in Spaulding, "west of the Hudson. He is a Seneca by adoption, colonel—one of the Five Nations. I ken his meaning to be that he was kidnapped as a child from one of the Maine tribes."

"An' I might well believe ye," returned Rogers, "save that he has a cursed French twist to many of his words. Try him in French."

But the Indian would return no answer to any question asked in that language, and all he would vouchsafe

Beset

concerning his lack of arms and his war-paint was to point northward and say that all he had had been taken from him and were there.

"I like it not," said Rogers. "There is hell's devilry in the man or I lose my guess. Yet I cannot find it in my heart to kill him on suspicion. Look here, friend, where are yer people?"

Again the savage shook his head, as though in sorrow, repeating the words "Pamala, pamala" at every fresh question.

"What's 'Pamala?'" asked Rogers, turning impatiently to Spaulding.

"From all I know 'tis the heathen god of the Agamenticus, who is said to live in the clouds around Mount Katahdin, in Maine," answered the voyageur. "I have travelled that land a bit. 'Tis like this fellow is swearing by his religion. This jumps with what he tells of himself. He is probably a broken brave who paints for the love o' colour an' is looked upon as a woman by his fellows. There are such—unless—unless——"

"Well, well," interrupted Rogers, "if we dawdle longer the French will get to Johnson ere we give him word of their coming. Lay off an' get ahead!"

He put down his rifle, and taking up the paddle he had dropped was about to make a stroke when Spaulding suddenly exclaimed:

"Wait but a moment, I have a stray idea." Then leaning forward he took hold of the gunwale of the stranger's canoe and spoke to the imperturbable savage.

"What does the Seneca—who is no Seneca, who is no Onondaga, who is no Onneyote, nor of those who possess flint; who is no Iroquois, who is but a damned lying Algonquin—mean by throwing dust into the eyes of the English? Does he hope to hunt without arms an' fish with no bait?"

"Canteetchee has said," replied the Indian, looking

The Strength of the Weak

fixedly at the voyageur. "His rifle, his axe is gone; his bait is there." The Indian pointed to beneath the surface of the lake.

"Is this true?" asked the voyageur.

"Tanto hears Canteetchee. Tanto knows. White man rob Canteetchee away two moons."

"Well, 'fore God, he forgot to rob ye of yer paint-pot, ye sneak," returned Spaulding, grasping the pendent line that hung from the Indian's hand.

"Curse him an' his paint-pot!" exclaimed Rogers. "We have lost all of a quarter of a mile in this palaver. Here, let him swim for it."

And with this he placed the end of his paddle against the side of the red-skin's canoe, and, by a dexterous thrust, overset the light fabric. Ere I realized what was about to happen the Indian disappeared beneath the surface of the lake, his upturned canoe lying like a log on the still water. With a loud laugh the colonel dipped his paddle deep, and we shot away ere the head of the surprised savage came up. Leaving him in his plight, we continued on for some hundreds of yards when the half-breed, who had uttered no word during the examination of the red-skin, but who had been throwing his keen eyes over his shoulder at every third stroke, suddenly stopped working, and, pointing back, uttered a guttural:

"See!"

Our progress at once ceased as attention was turned to the rear. The submerged Indian had righted his boat, baled it sufficiently to keep it well on the surface, and, as we looked in obedience to the call of the half-breed, he had clambered in and was hauling on the line he had held in his hand. In a moment there came to the surface what, even from our distant point, could be recognised as a rifle and its paraphernalia. It was at once apparent that they had been concealed in the water

Beset

that their presence in the canoe might not betray the hostility of the fellow, for, as we all well knew, nine-tenths of the arms served out by the French to their allies were stamped with the fleur-de-lys, and could be easily recognised at a glance.

"Um see heap good trick," said Polly, as the dripping arms came up.

"I feared something o' the sort!" exclaimed Spaulding. "Colonel, ye stopped me on the pint of discovery. I was about to handle that line when ye spilled him."

Rogers was too hot with anger to answer. With a muttered curse he grasped his rifle, and, levelling it at the distant canoe, fired. I saw the track of the ball as it cut the glassy water, but it fell short, and the twist to the bullet sent it skipping in long bounds far to the right of its intended mark.

"Waste no more time or powder on him," said the colonel; as the fellow dropped from sight and his canoe began to move towards the land. "I made a mistake, I own. In God's name, get on, else we will be headed by the whole gang! This comes from being in a hurry an' not waiting for darkness."

As though in answer to his words there came a ringing cry, faint in the distance. It was a war-whoop, pure and simple, and though it issued from the throat of a single man, and drifted almost musically across the water, it chilled me as though I had been plunged into the lake.

Though upon us the light of the coming day lay broad, the edges of the expanse of water were still lost in the shadow of the trees, and not one of us might guess what was lurking along the shore or how many eyes were on us as we drove along. The great lifts of land now known as Black and Prospect Mountains reared their green heads high above us, and caught the stronger

The Strength of the Weak

light from the east. Along the New Hampshire shore a fine mist, raised by the coolness of the night, hung like a silver cobweb waiting to be dispelled by the sun, and little wreaths of vapour rose about us from the glassy water, though they were not thick enough to obscure the vision.

We went on at a rapid pace for perhaps an hour, and the day was well advanced. Jessie and I were the only ones not at the paddles (Spaulding having taken the spare one), and we were sitting amidships, I facing the colonel, who sat in the stern. My attention was divided between the pale face of the girl and the spreading track of our canoe, the little swell of which glistened in the light like two diverging bars of polished steel, until they faded in the distance. I was marking them intently, when I saw a black dot shoot from the land far in the rear. It was followed by another and another, and when I had counted three canoes my heart gave a great leap, and I tried not to betray my sudden fright as I drew the colonel's attention to them.

"It has come, by the great Jehovah!" he exclaimed the instant he located them. Every head was turned, but not a stroke missed, and for a moment or two there came no further remark, though I noticed the canoe seemed to leap forward under the stress of the recent discovery.

"How far do ye call it to the head o' the lake?" asked Spaulding.

"Ten miles, an' they'll overhaul us in three."

"Not if we can hold this speed, an' I have a sneakin' idea we can."

"Nay, we cannot," returned the colonel, his face as black as a thunder-cloud, his hawklike visage, with its blue, clean-shaven jaw, alive with suppressed excitement. "I wonder can they be Iroquois?" he continued,

Beset

speaking more as if he had given vent to a thought than put a question.

"Them no Iroquois," said the half-breed, without turning his head. "Iroquois no call God Tanto; call God Manitou. Um see."

"Faith, 'tis true! Why did I not mark it in that fellow. They be all of an ilk, small doubt. Lord, Lord, what would I not give for shelter, if only breast-high! I would fight them alone an' live off the flesh on my own body ere giving up! Drive on! Drive on!" The daredevil in the man shone from his eyes as he spoke.

The fear of the entire party was now well defined. It could be seen in the set face of each one as anon a hasty glance was thrown to the rear, but otherwise it had not been expressed. The broad paddles spurned the water and sent it backward in foaming eddies, and the boat skimmed along as though suddenly possessed with new life. With the increased speed a silence fell, due as much to suppression and a desire to withhold an acknowledgment of the growing desperation of our situation as to save the breath necessary for the tremendous exertion of the workers. There was no tremor of fear on the countenance of the girl, who sat facing me, and she spoke no word, though her eyes constantly questioned mine as we flew along, the light frame of the canoe twisting under the impact of the sweeping strokes.

By this we were a little east of the centre of the lake, and the sun had swung above the hill-tops. Suddenly Rogers let go an oath, the fierceness of which caused the maiden to knit her brows and shrink.

"Beset before and behind!" he shouted, as he drove his paddle deeper. "Yonder comes the south wind again. What's to be done?"

I was glad enough for an excuse to shift myself on the pretence of looking forward, for a weakness clutched me—a state I knew was but due to nervousness and one

The Strength of the Weak

that would soon pass—and I cared not to show it. A mile or so ahead I saw the polished lake had turned dark under the whip of the wind, which, like that of the day before, would be likely to impede our progress if it did not make our going ahead an impossibility. To relieve the strain on me, a strain made well-nigh insupportable by my forced inactivity, I seized my rifle, and, thrusting its broad stock into the water, used it as a paddle, that I might be of some assistance, however trifling.

I dared not look around again lest I should see for a certainty what I feared was the truth—that despite all we could do our pursuers were gaining on us, and that when we met the wind they would soon come close. In this way we continued for several minutes, the dark line ahead drawing nearer the while, when I heard the distant crack of a rifle, and a bullet clicked against the barrel of my gun, and glancing from it struck the paddle of Spaulding, who was ahead of me, splitting the ash from top to bottom.

“Good God! are they as near as that?” exclaimed Rogers, as the woodsman ceased his stroke and looked at the broken blade in amazement. “Lay for the land, my lads. We can’t dance to this tune any longer, and I care not to go to hell through thirty fathoms of water. The jig is up!”

As he spoke he swung the stern about until the canoe pointed to the shore, while the voyageur fell to with the remnant of his paddle, and we drove for the land with hardly an appreciable decrease in our speed.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE PASS

As we swept on, now at right angles with our previous course and broadside to our pursuers, they turned in as though to head us, and I counted six men in each canoe, and was shocked to see how easily I could number them. Eighteen to five, not counting the girl, and I with my rifle soaking half-way to its muzzle. To land before them, if we could do so, and plunge into the rugged country that bordered the lake did not appear to me to alter our prospective fate. It is true that we would not be so huddled or present so clear a mark as we then made, though from the moment we began to head for the shore there was no more firing.

But we needed not the stimulant of a shot. If there had been a necessity for a spur to our exertions it was furnished by the yell that came to us as we changed our course, and the distance in no way softened the character of the sound. In this race we won, though as we landed and Spaulding caught his sister in his arms, with devilish ingenuity our pursuers turned in at a point less than a quarter of a mile below, not caring to expose themselves to a shot from shore.

"They will follow us up in a trice," said Rogers, as we stopped to breathe. "They have put the bay at the foot of Elephant's Head betwixt us, but they can round it with little delay and be upon us in fifteen or twenty minutes. We have only the grace of the hour."

"Elephant's Head!" exclaimed Spaulding, as he re-

The Strength of the Weak

lieved himself of his sister and panted, rearing his tall figure as though he would look over the trees.

"Aye, we be 'at the end of his trunk," answered Rogers. "We must cast about for a spot to put our backs agin an' fight. 'Tis all we can do. Seek it out, Polly. Oh, that I had but half their number of my own men!"

"'Tis the finger o' God!" shouted the voyageur, catching up the girl and almost losing coherency in his haste of words. "If I be not lost, I will have ye in a fort in the fifteen minutes ye give us. This way, this way! Come, lad. Follow me all!"

"Has the man gone mad over the stress?" cried Rogers, as Spaulding parted the bushes and went crashing through them in the direction of the coming savages.

"Nay," I answered hurriedly, as there came to me a quick realization of what the voyageur meant. "He lately told me of an old shack he had built. It must be hereabouts."

"Follow on, then, in God's name!" cried Rogers. "The devils will have to come to this spot to catch our trail. Polly, bring up the rear an' hold them back."

The half-breed gave a grunt, and, without waiting longer, I sprang into Spaulding's track, closely followed by Rogers. The way was fairly marked through the broken undergrowth, and we pressed on in haste, Jager, with the provision-bag over his shoulder and the tin pot dangling at his side, catching up to us and bounding ahead, as though danger had pricked his spirits, though he had not uttered a word for the past half-hour, or since the chase had been first discovered. The trail took us diagonally up a slight hill, over its top and down again to where a brook bawled in its bed, the water so fretted that its little pools held wads of spume that spun in the deeper eddies and told of its steep descent farther on.

Presently the way narrowed into a lovely glen

The Pass

strewn with pebbles, and so thick was the foliage that overhung it that night had not yet left the leafy cavern. There was a distant roar of falling water, and the bubbles and foam that sped swiftly by told us we were near a cataract. Here we found Spaulding seated on a rock and breathing like a spent stag. The girl was at his side.

"I am done up for the time," he exclaimed, panting betwixt the hurry of his words and his lack of breath. "But I have hit upon the way, thank God. Chatsworth, catch up the lass and hurry along. Keep to the brook—ye can't miss it. I will overtake ye soon."

Before he had ceased speaking the half-breed glided up. He gave a grunt as his black eye swept around the little green pocket; then stooped, and lifting a handful of round stones, poured a dozen of them into the mouth of his old musket. Kneeling behind a huge boulder he rested his barrel over it and said:

"Good place shoot two—three—five fool Algonquin."

"Faith," said Spaulding, "there is a place higher up that one man can hold agin twenty for a time, an' higher yet is the house." He held up his hand to command attention, and over the minor chord of falling water and leaves beginning to rustle in the risen wind I could plainly hear the cries of our pursuers in the distance.

"Up with ye, Chatsworth!" cried the voyageur. "Trust to him, lass; we will be after ye in a jiffy."

Without a moment's consideration I slung my useless rifle across my back and lifted the girl from the ground, her only remark as she placed her arm around my neck being, "What a pity!" But whether she had reference to my embrace or the necessity for being carried I did not stop to consider.

Leaving the four I hurried up the stream as fast as was possible thus encumbered, almost immediately los-

The Strength of the Weak

ing sight of those I had left, for what betwixt the arching boughs and tumbled rocks the eye could not discern two rods either before or behind. As I advanced the noise of the cataract increased at each step. Presently I came to an abrupt turn in the stream, and, despite my peculiar situation, one engrossing both mind and body, I was far from blind to the view that opened before me.

We were at the entrance of an amphitheatre of solid rock, the walls of which rose perpendicularly for forty feet or more. The sides were moss-covered, and dripping in places, while bushes, vines, and small trees sprang from fissures in the rocky face, breaking its severity. From the top of the wall bent the virgin forest, as if to look at the flower-bespangled grass that made a carpet for this lovely cathedral reared by Nature's hands. Directly opposite the entrance in which I stood the rock was cleft wedge-shape, and through the opening fell the brook, not in a disordered stream, but over a series of steps of considerable regularity, which turned the flow from the polished sheet of its first fall to a milk-white mass of churning water that cut across the level space and slid away at my feet. Through this cleft I could see a shelflike projection, and the great hill from which it shot, slightly levelled at the top, cut the clear sky, an uplift of land smooth in its cloak of green and as round as a woman's bosom. It was a picture in a frame of rock and verdure, and over all the sun threw a mass of dancing light and shade.

"Put me down," said the girl, as I stopped somewhat breathless from my exertions. "You cannot carry me farther."

"Cannot or must not?" I asked, as I placed her on the grass. She looked about her in open admiration at the beauty of the surroundings, and, without answering, continued:

"Is it possible that violence can intrude in such a

The Pass

place? It is like a temple of God. How much farther must we go?"

"Even up the steep ahead," I answered. "The fall makes a natural ladder."

"You cannot do it alone, and—and I am wearying you."

"I would to Heaven that nothing else might weary me more. As for doing it, I must, unless you forbid. Leonard was right, for yonder is another pass of Thermopylæ. One man could keep a host at bay until they could send a party over the mountain. It would take hours."

"Wait for the others," she pleaded, as I bent to lift her again.

"It is no time for foolishness, mademoiselle. I have my orders," I returned, impatiently. "Are you not willing to be helped by me?"

"You do not or will not understand me," she said. Then continued: "Take me and do with me what you will. I shall not protest again."

I made no answer, but, lifting her, hurried towards the cataract. Under the influence of the action of water and frost the trap-rock had split away in a series of steps and the loosened blocks been hurled down-stream or ground to powder by centuries of freshets. The bottom terraces of the fall were wide and low, the stream being confined to the path it had worn down the centre, so that for half a dozen steps upward I went dry-shod. Above, the cleft narrowed, the water filling its channel from wall to wall, and in a moment more I was up to my knees in the rushing flood, with my free hand clinging desperately to the roots and bushes that, fixed to the rock-face, offered me a hold and saved me from being swept from my slippery footing. The roar of the falling water was demoralizing, and now a false step meant something more than a trivial accident, as we

The Strength of the Weak

would have been precipitated into the pool twenty odd feet below, through the whirling surface of which showed the jagged blocks fallen from above.

I saw now that I had undertaken a task that would test my physical powers to the full, but not for an instant did I lose my wits. The girl, with her eyes closed, as though afraid to look on the snarling water about us, clung to me with a desperate hold, her head on my shoulder and her sweet lips within six inches of my own. Slowly I hauled myself up, the walls narrowing and the water deepening with each yard I gained, but finally it became necessary to use both hands. I had got into a critical position, as for the moment I could go neither backward nor forward. The thunderous rush of the flood made me dizzy, and it was then that I realized the bush I held was gradually letting go its hold on the cliff.

"Place your good foot down and cling to me with all your might," I shouted, though my words seemed lost in the clamour. The maiden opened her eyes just long enough for me to see the flash of terror in them, then she obeyed, and stood more than knee-deep in the chilly stream, which was tearing at us both as though it were a live thing bent on our destruction. With her action, I leaned forward and grasped a firmer stick, and then, with a grip on both walls, by main strength of arm lifted myself and the girl into a cleft where the step extended and left the water no more than over my ankle.

By this we were drenched from head to foot, but little I cared as I drew the maiden on to the small platform, where we were safe for the time, at least. A great dry sob (which I could not hear, but could feel) broke from her as she clung to me as she had never done but once, a fluttering sob like that given by a frightened child. The blank wall yet lifted ten feet above us. The water, confined to its narrow channel, hissed and spouted

The Pass

where it struck a projection or roared in its clear fall. The glen we had come from looked far below, and those I had left had not yet arrived. We were in the midst of a solitude, shut in from all but the sight of God, and as the terrified sob broke from the girl the present faded for the moment and time rolled back to the day when she had sobbed in my arms before. Without thought of my action, I bent my head and kissed the soft lips with the innocence of a child, just as I had done years ago. For all that it seemed a cowardly advantage I was taking, it was not so. It was in pity that I pressed my lips to hers. I think that in the depths of her brave heart the maiden so understood it, for she neither coloured nor frowned nor recoiled from the close embrace in which I held her through necessity, but she opened her eyes and actually smiled just as I have seen a child smile through its terror when finally it resigns itself to the love of its protector.

Besides assuring me of her confidence, the smile put a new strength into my well-nigh exhausted frame, and I prepared myself for a new effort. I could easily surmount the next step with the maiden in my arms, but I could not by main force and alone lift us both together to the top of the one above it—a terrace at least four feet high and over which the swollen stream threw its weight of water in a smooth, unbroken sheet. Had I been alone and unburdened I would have made little of scaling the cascade from bottom to top, but trammelled as I was it appeared necessary to await the coming of my friends that I might have assistance. To test the character of the level above and the depth of its pool, I left the girl standing alone for a moment and started to climb, but even as I leaned forward and my head cleared the edge of the wall I saw the rocky face had been split by some convulsion of nature, the projection behind us having hidden the opening, and a passage was offered

The Strength of the Weak

through which a man might easily attain the level of the land above. It was a miniature cañon, in short, and along its narrow bottom flowed a shallow stream that joined the cascade at the foot of the first leap of the main fall.

With a shout at my discovery I turned, and, lifting the maiden in my arms, soon stood in the corridor of rock. It was a plain and comparatively easy path for the remainder of the distance, and within ten minutes more we were at the top of the initial fall of the stream and looking down the roaring ladder up which I had clambered.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE FORT

HARDLY had we arrived when the men we had left burst into the amphitheatre, each one stopping as the curiously beautiful scene met his eye. As the voyageur saw me he threw up his hand in token of recognition and made a rush for the cascade, all following. In a few minutes more we stood together on the same level.

"Mighty king, but I scarce thought ye would have attempted the falls alone!" exclaimed Spaulding. "Ye be more of a man than I took ye for; 'twould have taxed the strength of a giant." He did not wait for my modesty to assert itself, but continued hastily: "I hold command here now. Polly, this is the spot for yer cannon. Chatsworth, stay with him an' hold them back; they be hard behind. When closely beset follow up the stream until ye come to an old landslip on yer left; climb it to yonder shelf an' ye will need no further direction. Up with ye, colonel, we will make ready above."

Saying this with vast energy (an energy born of hope), he took my useless rifle from me, handing me his own; then, without further words, stooped for his sister and stepped into the stream, up which he walked, followed by Rogers and Jager, while on either side of the brook crouched the half-breed and myself.

I had never shot at a human being in my life, but I knew that now I was about to do it, and the knowledge did not trouble me as it would have done a month or even a week before. I reprimed the rifle I held as care-

The Strength of the Weak

fully as though I was used to this sort of waiting, and thought coolly enough of every detail, even to keeping my wet clothes from contact with my gun. The half-breed did not deign to glance at me, but lay in the grass with his head just above the waving tops, his lynxlike eye fixed on the opening to the glen below.

In absolute silence we thus waited for perhaps a quarter of an hour. Presently an Indian in full paint stepped into the amphitheatre, gave a quick glance about, and disappeared again like a shadow, though he soon returned, followed by a number of his fellows. I did not stop to count them, for they scattered like flies over the grassy floor, making in devious ways towards the foot of the cataract. I did not count them, I say, because my eye had become fixed on the doings of one man who continually shouted to the others as he crept along close to the foot of the wall, and as he stopped and drew his bent form straight I recognised the figure and action of L'Anguille. The main body finally came together near the lower pool, and with a bound the Abnakis joined them, gesticulating fiercely, and pointing alternately at the face of the fall and the trail we had left across the glen.

How the snake happened to be so far from his home and on our trail was a puzzle to me, and for the moment made me doubt the identification; but when I considered that, according to the voyageur, he must know of our escape, I did not wonder, for the unforgiving nature of the savage is well known, and if the fellow followed us to Albany and into it, it would be no more than Spaulding had anticipated. Surely here was a chance for me to remove a constantly threatening danger to the man who had rescued me, and I was about to single out the savage I wished to kill when my intention was rendered abortive by the half-breed, whose presence I had momentarily forgotten. For at the instant I threw

The Fort

my rifle forward, Polly gave a grunt, stood up, and fired his musket, the recoil of the pebble-charged smooth-bore knocking him down as though he had been struck by a strong man.

I saw three red-skins fall, two going into the brook; but ere the crash of the report died, Polly was on his feet again, and, letting out an ear-splitting yell, fell to reloading his gun. The shot had the effect of driving every man from the glen, save those who had been hit, only one of whom appeared to be alive. The rest scattered like fragments of an exploded bomb, and as they converged towards the entrance I fired at the Abnakis. My ball passed over his shoulder, striking the man ahead, who, pitching forward as though he had stumbled, lay still, while his follower, leaping over his prostrate body, disappeared.

"Good!" exclaimed the half-breed, taking notice of me for the first time since I had met him and smiling as he extended his hand. "No soft heart, no little girl-boy like um thought. Good shot! Let's go now."

Saying this he whipped his rod into its socket, and again filled the musket with pebbles. "Kick like big cannon," he continued, as he rubbed his shoulder. "Kick Montagnais worse. See—one, two, three scalps loss. They all go round other way, um guess. Come."

Although the half-breed had apparently paid no attention to the direction the voyageur had given me, he instantly took the lead, bounding into the bed of the stream, along which we strode for perhaps an eighth of a mile, when we came across a great pile of stones which had diverted the course of the brook. This was the remains of an avalanche of earth which more than fifty years before had ripped bare the ribs of the hill and for several hundred feet laid clean the face of the living rock. Up this smooth acclivity we toiled, and at last came upon our party resting near the top. From this eleva-

The Strength of the Weak

tion I could see over the low hill in our front. Saint Sacrement spread far away north and south, its face fretted into little whitecaps by the wind, which had now increased to half a gale. Still ascending, we shortly came to a stretch of level land covered with magnificent trees and free from underbrush. It reminded me of a park grove I had seen near Quebec.

With a shout the voyageur sprang from the gully up which we had clambered, and, still with the girl in his arms, ran through the giant timber and on to a wide stump-encumbered meadow, which showed signs of having once been cultivated, and beyond which stood the house, built near the overhanging cliff or shelf I had seen some time before. Even as I strode by his side I could not help marking the magnificence of the view that spread before us, the peaks of the Adirondacks rising, pile upon pile, dark blue in the distance. The house itself looked stout enough as we came to it, though its bark roof had partly fallen in and the chimney was leaning to its destruction. At one end of this building (inferior to the cow-house at the seigneury) grew a young willow-tree which whipped its lithe branches over the broken roof, and, besides the humming of the wind in my ears, the soft hissing of its lancet leaves made the only sound I heard.

Placing his sister on the thick grass, the voyageur ran around the house. The door was leaning inward on its rotten leather hinges, and one kick sent it to the floor. With the noise of the crash out leaped a couple of flying squirrels, bounding over the sod until they came to the edge of the cliff seventy feet away, and there they launched themselves into the air scaling downward like a shingle until they were lost in the trees forty feet below. With the door down and the light through the roof there was no difficulty in marking the details of the interior. There were many chinks

The Fort

between the logs where the mud, placed there years before, had fallen away. The interior consisted of one large room with a fireplace, in the latter there being set a large iron pot. In one corner was a stack of wood; in another, a boxlike structure meant for a bed. Over the fire-place hung a large but very rusty skillet, and a quantity of dry cobs, gnawed clean by the squirrels, lay scattered about the floor. Two three-legged stools and a structure like a rude settle stood near the fire-place, while an old axe and two or three rusty beaver traps were thrown on its seat. On a peg in the wall hung an ancient and heavy surveyor's chain, the links clogged with rust, and to one end was attached a well-bucket, which in point of dilapidation made a good companion to the chain itself. On another peg hung a wolf-skin great-coat in the last stages of ruin, and a sprinkling of dead leaves and rubbish covered everything. But the most striking thing was the natural table that occupied the centre of the room. It was an immense pine stump around which the house had been built, its top, some two feet high, hewn smooth, its feet set deep in the everlasting hill on which it had been born at least a century and a half before. On this stood a copper candlestick green with age and dampness.

It took me but a few seconds to make a mental inventory of the contents of the hut and mark its condition, and I saw that, with food and water, we could withstand quite a siege, for the walls of the house would keep out any bullet save such as perchance found their way between the logs. I saw, too, that the building could only be attacked in force from its rear, as the yawning gulf beyond the cliff defended the front. In no direction could an enemy approach and be under more cover than would be given by the bushes and stumps about us. The first would be no protection from a bullet, the second were cut low, partly burned,

The Strength of the Weak

and would scarcely hide a skulking enemy. I began to feel a trifle more confidence in our ability to withstand attack.

As soon as he had poked into the various corners of the room to see that there were no snakes coiled within, Spaulding brought his sister and placed her on the settle. The colonel and Jager soon joined us, leaving the half-breed to watch the gully, and we set to work to make the place defensible. The door could not be rehung, but its bar would hold it in place, and it was fixed for instant closing. The fire-wood was used to stop the widest cracks in the wall, though the upper interstices were left open to be used as loopholes.

It was probably thirty minutes ere all preparations were completed, even to the reloading of guns, and there was as yet no sign of the hostiles. Telling me to pick up the kettle, or pot, and follow him, Spaulding took down the chain, with its bucket, and led me to the left of the cliff, through a slight dip in the land, and there, some eighteen feet below the shelf on which we stood, ran the brook, a milk-white stream as it tore around the rocks that filled its bed. Here the bucket was let into the boiling water, and we rinsed and filled the kettle. With six gallons of water and the scanty stock of provisions in the deer-skin bag the party might keep body and soul together for some days if the house could be held against assault.

"I wonder you did not build nearer the brook," I said, as we completed filling the vessel.

"'Twas because the other side of the brook makes too good a cover, an' the brook would be useless when once the house is beset. It was enough to clear the field by slashin' an' build the house without tryin' to lay bare a mountain-side. I wanted no trees about, and the willow yonder is an accident." He lowered his voice as he spoke. "Lad," he continued, "the willow

The Fort

was once the staff o' Felix. He cut it for a wand to kill reptiles in our way when first we prospected this section. As we came out on the cliff and there decided to build the next year, he thrust the stick into the 'arth to mark the spot, an' it was by the side of the great pine whose stump now makes the table within the cabin. When we came again two years later the wand had taken root, an' so we let it bide. It is the only monument the poor fellow has."

He stopped and seemed to be thinking as he gazed into space, then, coming to himself, said: "I wonder have the red-skins given us up? I was never in a tighter place than when we were on the lake."

"Aye, the relief is a godsend," I replied; "but they are not likely to give us up with L'Anguille among them."

The voyageur almost dropped the side of the kettle he had laid hold of, and, stopping his walk, stared at me in astonishment.

"Did ye see him?" he asked, in wonder.

"Aye, and shot at him."

"An' missed him?"

"I killed his fellow. I thought you heard when I was telling——"

"I heard nothing," he interrupted. "Mighty king! I'm almost glad ye failed. There is at hand his time or mine, and I am unchristian enough to wish him for myself. 'Twas he, then, an' not the fellow we doused that set them on—or—mighty king! was it himself I talked to and knew not under his paint? Good God, but I am getting into early dotage! List! List to that!"

As he spoke the roar of the half-breed's musket came from the distant grove. There was no mistaking the sound, which was instantly followed by Polly's appearance as he leaped into the clearing and ran towards the house.

The Strength of the Weak

"Lose not the water!" exclaimed Spaulding, as I threw out a quart or more in my sudden excitement. "Easy now, easy now. We are safe yet awhile."

We hurried along and arrived at the house ere the half-breed had compassed more than half the distance to his goal, and we watched him coursing like a deer until he had arrived within a hundred feet of us; then I saw a little puff of smoke at the edge of the wood, a faint crack coming a second later, and as the Mohawk half-breed fled into the shelter of the building, he wheeled about, dropped his musket, and fell prone almost at the door.

"Great Jehovah," cried Rogers, jumping to the side of the fallen youth and lifting him as easily as he had lifted Jessie, "I would rather ha' lost a leg than had this happen! Where were ye hit, Polly?"

The half-breed lifted his head and smiled as he spoke:

"One—two more. Um hit in back, colonel; no hurt." And with this he drooped in Rogers's arms and became unconscious.

There was nothing to do but bring the youth into the house and look for his wound. It was found—a small blue hole perilously near the left shoulder blade, and even in my unsophisticated state I knew the young man had fired his last shot. He soon recovered his senses, however, and asked for water, and then lay without speaking, gazing rather wistfully into the face of the colonel, who looked down upon him with more tenderness in his expression than I would have thought his severe countenance could have held.

By this it was near high noon, and the day would have been hot were it not for the gale. The sun was biting, and but few clouds broke the blue expanse above. Everything was put in order for a night attack, for the shot which had laid low the half-breed had not been followed up, and there was little danger of an assault

The Fort

while the light lasted. There were no signs of the enemy. The woods looked fair and peaceful as they trembled in the heat that rose from the meadow. The bushes between whipped and sprang in the wind, and the birds fluttered over the level as though the land was deserted by mankind.

I slept all through that afternoon, as did the maiden and her brother, and the last I saw as I closed my weary eyes was the colonel sitting by the side of the dying youth, and Jager standing, rifle in hand, his lean jaw working slowly, his eye to a broad crack between the logs.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE ATTACK

I WAS aroused by the colonel's hand on my shoulder. The sun was dipping behind the mountains to the west, the last rays streaming through the doorway, which had not yet been closed. The lake was already in shadow. Spaulding and Jager were at the wall, the youth stretched panting on the settle, and the maiden lay on the wolfskin coat, still slumbering.

"They be up to something, I know not what," whispered the voyageur, as I stepped to his side, wonderfully sharpened by my long rest. "Watch yonder!"

I fixed my eye on the spot indicated close to the edge of the woods. There I could see well-nigh a dozen savages leaping from one tree to another, like children playing, and with apparently no more object than to confuse the eye and make it impossible to count them, and the effect was to make them appear twice their true number. Anon, one would advance into the open, and, standing for a moment, swing his arms as though in defiance, then, suddenly shifting his position, would crouch behind the nearest stump, only to leap into sight and mingle with his fellows. At that comparatively safe distance they offered us all sorts of obscene insults, and occasionally vented themselves in a concerted shout.

"They be trying to draw our fire, doubtless," muttered Jager, as he bit into his plug. It might have been so, but we gave no sign of having seen them, and pres-

The Attack

ently a single savage advanced nearer than ever, and, raising his gun, fired at us. I heard the bullet strike against the house, and immediately the whole force—thirteen men—gave a simultaneous yell, and, falling into single file, ran across the face of the woods in full view and disappeared into the ravine through which tumbled the brook. Jager gave a grunt, and in derision spat at them.

“Do they think they have been trailing children?” he asked, turning and showing his yellow teeth in a broad smile. “They would have us think they have deserted their quarry. None of the Five Nations are so simple.”

But indeed it seemed as though they had gone for good, as the silence became profound, and the sun and wind going down together left us in the rapidly darkening cabin. With a watch closely maintained, a small fire was kindled, but so shaded that it did not light the interior of the hut, and we ate and drank with a heartiness that was hardly lessened by our anxiety. The gloom gathered rapidly. When the fire died at last, the house became pitchy dark, and nothing within could be distinguished save the faint glow of pipes, nothing heard but the quickened breathing of the half-breed and an occasional rustle as we shifted our bodies. A faint patch of the sky showed through the broken roof, and from its velvety depths one bright star shone out. All else was obliterated. The door had long been barred.

Taking the colonel's place by the wounded youth, I passed the time holding the lax hand, my eye alternately searching the cavernous blackness of the cabin's interior and for relief turning to the twinkling orb overhead. The girl, whom I had last seen huddled in a corner, gave no indication of her presence, and for a long time not a sound broke the terrible hush that reigned within and without.

The Strength of the Weak

But this oppressive peace was not destined to last, nor had I looked for such a length of quiet. The moon, some six days beyond its fulling, rose late, and as it cleared the woods and its diminished radiance brightened the land and shot a faint light through the loop-holes, I heard Spaulding exclaim:

"Mighty king, but I smell a danger! At sunset there were no bushes within fifty paces of the house; now look yonder at those in less than ten."

He had barely spoken the words when the half-breed's fingers closed on mine; he struggled to a sitting posture, and, pulling my hand upward as though he would point it, he uttered aloud:

"Manitou! Tanto! God! *See!*" Then, sliding from my grasp, fell sidewise to the floor.

I looked up. The ragged hole in the roof was blocked. The star had suddenly disappeared, and outlined against the now more radiant sky I saw the round head of a savage framed in the opening, the single feather in his scalp-lock, tipped by the moonlight, standing out like a long leaf.

Without hesitation, but instinctively, I raised my rifle and pulled the trigger. The crash of the report and the fall of the body to the floor seemed simultaneous, but as the latter struck I saw a long, thin line of fire leap inward from the end of the wall and half-way across the room. The report that followed told us we were at last beset at close quarters, for a rifle had been thrust in between the logs and fired at random.

What followed I cannot tell in detail, for betwixt the noise and the smoke I could do no more than keep my head enough to get my rifle properly reloaded. I heard five shots after mine, given in quick succession, and brought up by a roar from the musket, then a shower of curses mingled with other shots and

The Attack

wild yells from without. Running to where I had last seen the girl, I placed my hand on her. She shrieked as I did so, thinking—as she afterward told me—that I was an Indian, but, finding otherwise, relapsed into silence, and I joined the others at the wall.

The fight had been short and sharp. By the time I had got a position the worst was over. In the half-light I could see four men running across the plain, while close to the house lay two more on the grass. Spaulding reloaded coolly, but the colonel was in a frenzied hurry as he whipped his rod in and out of his barrel, his constantly gritting teeth sounding like a rasp, and Jager, with his eye at a loophole, was swearing at the prostrate men without, utterly unconscious of his absurdity.

Presently silence fell once more, and the smoke within the house drifted through the broken roof.

"They will not assault again until gray morn," said Rogers.

"'Tis a hopeless lookout when they do," answered the voyageur. "They may easily pick up help, but there is none for us."

"Whether or no," returned the colonel, "some one must get to Johnson ere the sun rises. If he has arrived at the lake ye might be succoured in a pig's whisper. 'Tis only ten miles on, an' ye cannot face another night like this."

"We had a hard time to get hither," interposed Spaulding, "but I fancy 'twould be harder to get hence."

"'Tis as easy as dyin'."

"Aye, the same thing."

"Nay, I mean it. The chain would let us down to the bed o' the brook, an' we could make our way back as we came. I'll warrant the canoe is untouched—they were too hurried after us."

"Go, then, an' God be with ye," said the voyageur ;

The Strength of the Weak

"though were ye under my orders I would forbid it. However, I stay here with the girl; she cannot be moved."

"And I remain with you," I put in, for the risk of attempting to escape, to say naught of other considerations, determined me to stay by my friend. From the darkness I heard a sob break from the maiden.

"Good!" exclaimed Rogers. "Ye can make a stout fight, and may look for me back at nightfall, if all goes well. Come, Jager, now is our time."

"Will Johnson take the risk o' sending?" asked Spaulding.

"Ne'er doubt it, friend. He would for the half-breed alone. List ye. Polly is Johnson's own son—by the way o' nature, ye know—an' did he skulk at sending, ye may count on Rogers an' a score o' his men. I will talk to the lad."

I heard him feeling his way towards the settle, and then he stumbled. The next moment he uttered a loud exclamation.

"Great Jehovah!" he shouted. "Polly lies dead upon the floor! A black night, a black night, indeed! How can I break this to Johnson? He bid me have a care o' the lad, an' thought more o' him than o' any child he had. Oh, my son, my son! I loved ye like a father myself!"

His grief was genuine and his lamentation uttered without regard to those who might be outside. But the death of the youth seemed to cut the only cord that held him to the house. Having fully made up his mind as to his duty, which was to carry to his commander the news we had given him and get help to us, there was no breaking his will, and to me his haste seemed reasonable enough, although I had grave doubts that Spaulding and myself could hold the house against another assault.

The Attack

And they went, he and Jager ; but why the colonel took the man and left us so weak I cannot fathom even to this day. And Spaulding went with them to bring back the chain.

Those who know the nature of the red-skin know that after being repulsed they rarely attack an intrenched position in the same hour, unless, indeed, their force be great. Of the original eighteen of the hostiles I could account for at least half their number as either killed or wounded (and they knew nothing of our loss), therefore the risk taken by Spaulding in going forth was not a great one. The moonlight was too faint for the party to be distinguished from a distance, and for the present, at least, the enemy was thoroughly demoralized. Moreover, there was little danger of a repetition of the attack before the gray of dawn.

But to me, left alone with the girl and two dead men, it meant nerves somewhat strained. I did not attempt to comfort the maiden for fear my state would become manifest, so to give myself work I dragged the lifeless bodies outside, and then took up my watch at the rear, while Jessie stationed herself at the end of the room on the lookout for her brother. The door was left open that the voyageur might have free ingress in case of being hurried.

It was gruesome waiting. Over the level my eye swept, and saw nothing save the moonlight glimmering on the bushes and stumps, which latter, to my overwrought imagination, turned to moving savages a dozen times. Before me lay the bodies of the hostiles killed in the assault. I sat there until I suddenly realized that the voyageur had been gone nearly an hour, or three times as long as was necessary to have let twenty men over the brink of the cliff. The strain of uncertainty became unbearable, and I deserted my post and walked the floor in distress of mind, while Jessie, at last catch-

The Strength of the Weak

ing my spirit, limped from one loophole to another, as though the last would give her clearer vision.

"Oh! why doesn't he come?" she at length exclaimed, and her voice showed her anxiety.

"God only knows," I answered, in my extremity; "we are in the hollow of his hand. Shall I go out after them and see?"

I stepped to the door.

Her negative was almost a shriek, and, turning, she crossed the room and, feeling for me, clung as a woman only clings to the man she loves.

"You will not go! You will not go!" she sobbed, and the panic in her voice was complete. "Maurice, Maurice, you will not—you dare not leave me! You are all I have! You are all I have!"

My heart gave a great bound, and I threw my arm about her. If Rogers, backed by his force of rangers, had appeared at that moment I would have felt no more lifted from my fear of the future than when this maiden appealed to me, and, more in manner than in words, bared her heart. It was a revelation that opened my eyes to many things in the past. I had been a blind fool, and the fact was forced on me in my greatest extremity. Yet it appeared from our situation that I was to but sip of the cup of bliss and then resign it and all else, still I was not afraid. It occurred to me like a flash that fear had driven from her a sense of the significance of her words and act, and that I was taking an unfair advantage, but in the whirl of my emotion I gave it no second thought. I simply drew her yet closer and said:

"Jessie, even at the point of death no woman speaks that way to a man unless she means more than she says."

She strained a trifle, as though she would draw from me, and answered:

The Attack

“And does a man kiss a maiden and not mean more than—than——”

“It depends upon the man,” I answered, tentatively, as she hesitated.

“But you meant it,” she put in quickly. “I saw it in your eyes. I knew it—I felt it for the first time. O Maurice, you will not leave me alone!”

“Never in this world,” I returned.

There was no direct answer, and in her fright I hardly looked for one; but the subtle something that lovers know, and which needs neither light nor sight nor sound, told us both the story. It might have been that her hold on my hand tightened, or that she pressed a trifle closer, or that her lithe form yielded as I spoke. I know not, but I do know that there in the black cabin, with a hideous danger near us, my lips met hers, and that there the glory of my life began.

From that moment the last of my fear fled. It was as though the Almighty had sent his angel to reassure me, and I became as certain of the return of the voyageur, of the confusion of our enemies, and of our ultimate rescue as though the map of events lay spread before me. But I did not see the deep waters through which we had yet to pass.

CHAPTER XL

THE PASSING OF L'ANGUILLE

BUT for all the confidence I possessed, I was unable to impart it to my love, who passed the hours intervening until daylight betwixt alternating hopes and fears. I could base my certainty of rescue or her brother's safety on no logical argument, and, though sure of the end, dreaded the early dawn, believing it would be the signal for further tragedy.

And it was, though scarcely of the sort I expected.

The moon was yet well above the western horizon when it began to pale in the creeping light. The lake was hidden in a veil of mist, for which I thanked God, as it would conceal the outgoing party, presuming Rogers's hopes had been realized and the canoe found intact. Slowly the great tide of day swept from the east until the land lay plain in the sickly light. There was no sign of movement about us; even the air was deadly still.

I was looking intently at the black mass of the forest, when Jessie, who was at the opposite wall, or that towards the brook, exclaimed in a strident whisper:

"Look! Look!"

I hastened to her side and peered through the loop-hole. There, upon the very spot down which Rogers and his companion must have been lowered, came no less a personage than the Abnakis, L'Anguille. He was not walking openly, neither did he take advantage of the stumps to hide himself from the house; but, with

The Passing of L'Anguille

his body half-bent, he glided along the edge of the cliff, as though following a trail, moving so rapidly with his snakelike motion that in the half-light I dared not risk a shot at him. At first I marked nothing but the man, but in a moment more discovered he was bearing an unusual burden, for, besides his rifle, there trailed behind him the surveyor's chain, to which was yet attached the water-bucket. I confess that my heart sank then, though I felt that at last I had the fellow, and that here he would pay for his misdeeds. As he got opposite the house, anon glancing towards the yet open door of the cabin, I could hardly have missed him. I do not know what might have happened had not Jessie caught sight of the chain and bucket, but as the significance of their being carried by the Abnakis dawned on her she forgot herself, and exclaimed :

“ They have killed him ! ”

Low as was the cry, it appeared to be enough for the trained ear of the savage. How he could have heard the sound was past my comprehension, for, though intense, her voice had not been loud ; but, as if the earth had opened for him, he disappeared, though I knew he had but sunk behind a stump almost before the door and not more than a rod from the cliff's edge.

Though my heart was torn at the thought of misfortune to the voyageur, and torn by the low sobbing of the girl by my side, I was not for a moment lost to the peculiar circumstance of the open appearance of L'Anguille and the fact that he was following a trail along the edge of the cliff, where, to my knowledge, no one had passed. That the astute savage should expose himself so close to the cabin admitted of but one conclusion, and that that he thought it deserted. A brief survey of the surrounding field showed me that thus far he was alone, and, placing the weeping girl on guard at the

The Strength of the Weak

rear wall, I settled down near the door to watch the Eel's next move, and with it make a move myself.

Beyond the cry of the maiden there had been no demonstration made from the house, and I hoped our continued quiet might raise the fellow's curiosity or give him confidence. I even refrained from thrusting my barrel through the loophole, and presently it appeared that I had been very wise. But it was in appearance only.

I had been congratulating myself that the savage was fairly trapped unless there came a diversion in his favour, a matter that was not unlikely at this time; but as the minutes swung into a quarter of an hour, and then into the half, without an alarm from Jessie, I became as much perplexed at the continued quiet of the hidden man as I was made hopeful by the unbroken peace. It was then that I determined not to waste a rifle-shot at such close range when the pebble-charged musket would do as well. I was in the act of reaching for the old weapon which had belonged to the half-breed when the red-skin behind the stump gave a quick roll, came broadside to me, and lay exposed for his entire length. I was astounded at this suicidal change of tactics; but an instant later saw that he had not been trying to protect himself against a shot from the house, for he cautiously raised his head, and, peering over the stump, appeared to be regarding something that menaced him from the direction of the gully up which we had clambered the day before. Who or what his unseen enemy could be I knew not, nor for the moment did I care. All my faculties were centred on finishing the fellow as he lay. Slowly thrusting the clumsy barrel through the widest crack, I took a long and careful aim at the recumbent figure and pulled the trigger. Instead of the terrific recoil and report I had looked for, the flint descended with a loud click, throwing out a

The Passing of L'Anguille

shower of sparks only. The thing had missed fire, I thought; but it had only hung, for, as I dropped the stock, letting the barrel bind in the loophole, the piece went off with a roar, discharging its contents towards the sky, while the kick drove it across the room, where the stock, coming in contact with the opposite wall, broke off just below the lock.

But of these minor details I knew nothing at the time, for as I laid my hand on my rifle I marked the savage leap to his feet and look with unfeigned astonishment at the cabin from which had come what was to him an unexpected attack. He wasted no time in investigation. Bounding across the open, he ran towards the point to which he had been looking, and was out of range of my eye ere I could get my gun to bear on him.

But I was in no mood to lose the man. With Jessie's cry ringing in my ears I ran out, and rounding the corner of the house saw that which brought me to a standstill. As the savage made for the gulch I marked the figure of a man rise from a hollow in the ground and confront him. At a glance I recognised the voyageur, but ere I had even time to wonder why he had lain concealed at a point opposite to that from which he might have been expected, he raised his rifle. At the act L'Anguille halted and did the same, the distance between the men at that time being about two hundred feet. As though fired by signal, both guns spurted their little puffs of smoke, and the two reports blended so accurately that they might have been one. It was a flying duel without seconds, and neither man fell, though the Indian dropped his rifle to the ground and grasped his right arm at the elbow. With a shout worthy of the throat of a red-skin the voyageur threw away his empty piece, and, drawing his knife, ran towards his wounded enemy. That each had seen the other for some time and had been playing for an open-

The Strength of the Weak

ing was now evident enough, and the watching on both sides might have been indefinitely prolonged had it not been for my shot, which had shown the savage that he was in danger from two quarters and had driven him from his cover. It was equally plain that his arm had been shattered by the ball from the voyageur's rifle, yet, like a bronze statue, he stood and faced his enemy until he was almost upon him, then, turning, ran towards the woods.

But it was only to find that his way was blocked, for I stood fairly in his path and raised my gun. That his end had come must have been apparent, for, as he saw me, he stopped and turned as though to grapple with Spaulding. Undoubtedly he was a brave man, and had he not been crippled he would have had a chance to kill the woodsman, even though he lost his own life in the threatening hand-to-hand combat, but under the circumstances he was well-nigh helpless. I can never know what went through his mind and determined his actions, but for one moment he stood outlined against the sky, then wheeled from his former track and made straight for the edge of the cliff, the voyageur close on him. As L'Anguille neared the brink he let out his voice in a sound that was half a wail and half a shout of defiance, and, rushing at the gulf, sprang out with a bound that carried him some distance into space. Even as he fell I could hear his cry, but it was quickly quenched in the sound of crashing branches as the body plunged into the tree-tops far below.

For the moment I stood like one petrified. The tragedy had been so sudden, the end so unexpected, and the deliverance of Spaulding so complete, that it was hard to believe my own senses. The voyageur had pursued his enemy until the intent of the latter had become clear, then, like me, he halted and watched the leap. As the Algonquin's last cry died in the crash of

The Passing of L'Anguille

his fall and the sound of breaking branches ceased, I ran up to the woodsman. He met me with a broad smile on his drawn face, his hand outstretched.

I fear me I make a poor hero, for I have not the sense, or perhaps the ability, to hide my emotions, and I fancy this weakness lay plain to the eye of Spaulding as I caught him, not by the hand, as might have been proper, but, in excess of joy and relief, fairly about the body. If my youthful demonstration caused me to fall in his respect he failed to show it. In truth I think his relief at the ending of the Algonquin was as deep as mine at his own safety, though, in his greater maturity, he better controlled his emotions. His return greeting was hardly less cordial than mine, however, though more dignified, and, after recovering his rifle, we walked towards the cabin. In this walk I noticed how free from hurry were his steps and how lax his guard.

Had we been other than we were we would have met with a warm reception as we entered the house. In my absence Jessie had fortified herself in a manner that spoke well for both her wit and her determination, even if it spoke as loudly of her fears. In utter ignorance of what was happening without and unable to close the heavy door, she had reloaded the broken musket and laid the clumsy barrel across the table or stump, so that it commanded the entrance to the cabin. The settle had been drawn in such a position that it backed against the stump of the stock, and the girl had but to reach around the end of the seat and pull the trigger to explode the weapon. She had then placed her pistol where, in extremity, she could use it against herself.

I could well imagine the state of mind that compelled these preparations, nor could a lifetime of happiness fairly atone for the mental agony she endured. As certain of the death of her lover as she was of her brother's misfortune, and fearful of her own ultimate fate, hope

The Strength of the Weak

was at the lowest ebb as she waited through the silence that ensued after the death-song of the savage. Hearing our footsteps, she thought the end at hand.

As we entered the cabin her dark eyes, wide with an emotion deeper than anxiety, were peering above the edge of the bulwark formed by the back of the settle, and as she saw us she threw up both hands and began to laugh. Her revulsion of feeling was complete, and for a time both her brother and myself were helpless to quiet her. I little wondered at her emotion, though puzzled at its character, not then being used to the ways of maidens and the manifestations of hysterics.

She became rational at last, however, for her brain was as sound as her body, and presently she was talking quietly enough, yet with a queer little look in her eye and a queer little intonation in her voice when she spoke to me, her dear heart probably wondering the while if, manlike, I would blurt out to her brother, and before her, the tremendous secret that we held between us.

But little need she have feared from him. In this matter I was as callow as the girl herself, as fearful of exposure, and, moreover, the sweet consciousness I possessed grew sweeter and sweeter with each moment I lived, and to me was too sacred a thing to be lightly spoken of or shared with any one save the maiden—my Jessie.

But it was hard to get from the material world just then. With entire unsuspection Spaulding dove into the happenings of the hours in which we had watched and waited and feared, and the light laugh he gave, when once we had settled down, was so unusual that, to the exclusion of most all else, he commanded our attention.

CHAPTER XLI

THE TRACK OF THE ARMY

"Ah, but by yer faces I see ye have had an anxious time of it!" said Spaulding, as his sister sat with her cheek against his broad shoulder.

"Something of the sort," I answered, as I glanced at the maiden.

"But were ye as watchful as ye might ha' been ye would ha' seen me pass along the edge o' the cliff. Where were your eyes?"

Jessie, unmarked by her brother, turned rosy, and I, knowing right well where my attention must have been, made no answer. But my heart sang.

"Well, they be gone—to the last one. Listen. From the facts that I believed ye safe until dawn, that it was fair goin' by moonlight, and that I did not care to eat my heart out all day in uncertainty as to the getting off o' Rogers, I made up my mind to go again to the canoe, scarce a mile away, an' either see them off or bring them back. Unsartainty is but a livin' death, my son.

"It was as the colonel hoped. The canoe lay there untouched, an' away they went, so that if Johnson is at the lakeside they will be back by nightfall, though there is small need of force now. It was while on my way back an' feeling along the mouth o' the glen that I saw the band come down the fall, and then they gathered up the dead red-skins that lay in the brook. The Abnakis could not ha' been with them, for I counted

The Strength of the Weak

but eleven men. While I halted an' hid, a crippled savage (one hit, but not killed, by the half-breed) called to them, an' it was through their talk with him that I larned they had deserted us, fearing the battle o' the night would call up the Iroquois (for we be well south of Algonquin territory), an' they were far from home, an', moreover, because they had come to the conclusion that we were safely housed an' that they were being fooled by the savage who had led them, a man not of their tribe. In this last I fancy I smelled the Abnakis. Never mind. L'Anguille was not with them, an' I still had him to fear, that being as bad as I wished.

"I got back to the chain an' swarmed up, an' ye might ha' seen me walkin' along the cliff had ye not been blinded by something—God knows what! I might ha' given ye a word o' comfort then, only I wanted my trail to go anywhere save towards the house, an' so kept on to the gully, an' mayhap 'tis a good thing I did. The fright ye had may make ye keep yer eyes open hereafter."

I repressed a smile and my heart sang on. The maiden coloured again.

"Well, well, ye know the rest. The Abnakis found the chain, an' thought we had all fled until he marked my trail, an' began to run it down. Ye must ha' startled him mightily; but for the shot we might ha' been stalkin' each other all day. He chose a brave death at last—the he-devil! Well, let him rest. We can now eat, sleep, an' be prudent an' wait for Rogers."

But Rogers came not that night, nor the next, nor, indeed, did he ever come, and, fortunately for us, we had no need of him. We seemed to have been in the vortex of a whirlpool, the spot of least disturbance, for all about us was intense activity, a fact unknown to us in our eyrie.

For the better part of two months we stayed on Ele-

The Track of the Army

phant's Head, while heaven and earth sang as it did at the creation when love ruled all. The secret between Jessie and myself had grown to tremendous proportions. There was no reason why we should have hidden it from the voyageur save that we thought the quality of our affection was above all others, easily misunderstood, and too sacred to share or parade. Moreover, the matter of marriage had hardly been considered, it appearing to lie so far in the future. Yet I suspected (aye, now I know) that the voyageur had something more than an inkling of the state of affairs.

No one suggested that Rogers had been faithless. Not I, even in thought, for my charity was too broad, and besides I now knew the dangers of travel either by water or land, and the delays incurred. If after a fair start in a sound canoe the colonel had not returned from the head of the lake, it was because Johnson had not arrived there. So we reasoned. We waited until the number of days ran into ten, and, as nothing threatened us and Jessie's foot was fast mending, we breathed easier than for many a week. It was our chance for the long rest we coveted, and we took it, not dreaming the while that Rogers was at the great Carrying Place on the upper waters of the Hudson, where he was being held; that Johnson was but just leaving Fort Lyman, which he had stopped to build, and was only then pushing through the wilderness to the head of the lake; and that the French, more than three thousand strong, with a cloud of red allies in the van, were sailing up the Drowned Lands but a few miles in our rear, seeking to find and tame the little army of half their number which was destined soon to tame them.

For all the joy of loving and being loved, for all the peace, for all the plenty, I could not long have endured the delicious inactivity I was experiencing. We had only to stretch out our hands to gather sustenance. The

The Strength of the Weak

red deer came almost to the door and grazed over the long neglected field, the brook teemed with fish, and the forest was festooned with vines and tangled with spiked berry-bushes. Our duties were next to nothing. Of course we mended the roof and repaired the door and partitioned a place for the maiden, together with making other improvements for our comfort. Of course we buried the slain, putting the half-breed in a grave by himself and carefully marking it. The Abnakis was found and interred at the foot of the cliff near the spot on which he fell, his rifle and the old musket being hung together over the fireplace, trophies of that stern day that brought me my happiness. And there they probably went to their destruction piecemeal. I never saw either again.

By the end of July I noticed a restlessness in Spaulding, and, indeed, I knew it was growing in me. I began to think sharply of my future, for I felt that now I had a great responsibility. I thought, too, of my mother, and wondered where she could be and what her state, but in this Spaulding always soothed me by asserting his constant belief in her safety and personal comfort. We were a little at loss as to the exact date when we determined to start south again, having long since given over hoping for Rogers. I thought it was the first day of September, but it was really the third when we finally set our backs to the little house and struck into the great grove. As we reached the timber I turned and for the last time looked at the diminutive shack that had been so much to me. It stood tight enough, its ragged peak gilded by the rising sun. The smoke of the dying fire on the deserted hearth drifted from the chimney and trailed southward, like a finger pointing our course, and the willow swayed its fringed whips in the scant air as though it waved a farewell and mourned our going. For the rest, the view took in the

The Track of the Army

grandeur of the world, but I turned away, home-sick for the barren little hut and as sorry for its desolate interior as though it were human and was reproaching us.

We had planned to strike east to the Drowned Lands, then south and along the level of Wood Creek to the trail that led to Albany. It was decided as useless to attempt making for the head of the lake, as we had no canoe and the shore land was terribly rough; besides, Johnson could not be there. We made but five miles the first day, then, as the country grew easier, bettered our distances. There was a suggestion of the coming change of season, for the running vines that swung from tree to tree were scarlet, the golden-rod and aster flaunted their red and purple banners, the foliage was fading, though the leaves were not yet falling, and the nights held a creeping chill that told the story of the aging year. Its lustiness had gone.

To us there was no indication that an army had been passing, for the French had advanced by water to the mouth of Wood Creek, and we were going along parallel to their route, but behind, and unsuspecting of the nearness of the invaders. We might have taken the hint when one evening we came out on the shore of South Bay and discovered in a small clearing a hut of logs in which was a dead man. He sat, or leaned, in a corner, his blank eyes turned towards the door through which we entered. In his hand was a stout stick and the middle of his forehead showed a bullet-hole. He was an Englishman in appearance, a trapper by his dress, and his scalp was missing. The voyageur put him down as a victim of some Indian outrage.

We passed on, not caring to camp near the scene of the recent tragedy; but the next morning our eyes began to open, for we found a broken canoe on the shore and the bodies of an Indian and a white man, the latter in the uniform of a sous-officer of French regulars, the

The Strength of the Weak

former a Mohawk by every sign known to Spaulding. They had fought and fallen in the bushes in what was probably a hand-to-hand encounter, and without witnesses, for the body of neither had been mutilated. After this we moved cautiously, and within a few miles there was borne upon us the fact that an army had passed ahead of us, and not many days before. From near the head of South Bay and along Wood Creek its path lay as plain as the stream itself. Corduroyed swamps trampled underbrush and felled trees, with here and there a souvenir of the march in the shape of cartouche-boxes, broken bayonets, crippled wheels, and the riff-raff usually cast aside by an army, all lying in the dead silence of the forest, yet wonderfully eloquent of the passion of man and the present purpose of the French. If these things had been wanting, or had we failed in giving them their full significance, all doubts were dispelled when, from a height, we saw the head of the bay itself filled with all manner of craft, from the birch canoe to the sailing bateau—the flotilla of the French—and upon the shore a score or more of tents belonging to the encamped detachment that had been left in the rear to guard it.

We knew then what had been detaining Rogers, and we did not pursue our course along the open and comfortable way made easy by the tread of thousands, but shifted to the less suggestive but rougher land to the east, though still holding parallel to the road made by the invaders. Every morning the voyageur would scout for the trail of the army and speak of the stragglers and runners he had seen, but at last we became surprised that there was no deviation from the straight course southward, for we were well beyond the head of Saint Sacrement, and knew nothing of the building of Fort Lyman,* then the real object of the French.

* Now Fort Edward on the Hudson.

The Track of the Army

To us it looked as though Dieskau had determined to make a descent on Albany, and the contemplation of such a gigantic stroke took my breath. It is perhaps strange that I never gave a thought at that time to the possibility of the nearness of De Mantel.

On the morning of what proved to be September seventh we were some ten miles beyond the head of Saint Sacrement and but five from Fort Lyman, though, as I have said, we knew nothing of the latter's existence. Like a marine unable to take altitude sights while at sea, the voyageur had estimated our position by "dead reckoning," figuring on the position of the sun, the shortness of the shadows, and the guessed at rate of our progress. That night our camp was made on a slight elevation, that we might be away from the damp of a small black pool that lay half-surrounded by woods at the foot of the hill. We were near the edge of a fire-clearing, and the skinny arms of the blasted trees stretched upward as though appealing to heaven to witness their hopelessness and desolation. Through their bleached skeletons we could see two uplifts of land, which Spaulding finally recognised as West and French Mountains (thus localizing us exactly), and the trail of the army at last turned abruptly, as though the invaders had aimed to go between them.

CHAPTER XLII

BLOODY POND

DETERMINED still to continue parallel to the beaten track until crossing the trail running south, we started on through a series of swamps corduroyed by the French, the character of the land compelling us to take to the military road for some distance—an act of considerable risk. The morning of this momentous day was hot, the air still, and all nature seemed to drowse. We had gone on our way some three miles when the voyageur stopped and held up his hand. We halted. A dull jar like distant thunder—more a motion than a sound—seemed to run through the tree-tops. It was repeated again and again, and Spaulding turned to me, his eye lighted with excitement.

“Guns! Heavy guns!” he whispered. “He has met Johnson!”

I do not know that I ever felt so strange in my life. It was not fear, but the tremble caused by the distant cannon roused a new sensation in me, an awe, a sudden consciousness that two great bodies of men were fighting, and that the issue was a matter of terrible import. I lost myself for a time and stood there, while the limp leaves hung motionless all about, while along the air, like increasing waves, the roll of far-off cannon broke over me and brought visions that fired my blood and sent it tingling through my veins. The sound of the contest roused me as the smell of raw flesh rouses the panther, and I heard the crashing of great balls, the roar of fire-

Bloody Pond

arms, the yells of desperation, the blare of brass, and music of bands. I saw the charge and the waving of banners. At least I thought I saw these things. There was no agony, no blood, no broken spirits, only the clash and din of war. Ah, me! I had never seen a battle.

I finally became conscious that Spaulding was pulling me back the way we had come, and was fairly shouting at me.

"What ails ye, lad? Are ye lost at the sound o' firin'? Is yer spirit weakening at this late day? Get on! Get on! We must back to our last camp."

"Why so?" I asked, stopping again to listen.

"Why so? Are ye daft, Chatsworth? 'Tis nigh clear water on either side o' the track, an' the road will be o'errun by the French an' red-skins whether they win or lose. We must lie by awhile. If ye have no sense for yerself, think o' Jessie."

I did think of the maiden, and the thought brought me to myself and hurried me into action. We each took an arm of Jessie and made our way back towards our former camp near the pond, the voyageur throwing many a hasty glance behind and before. And his anxiety was justified, for we had barely cleared the swamp when he swung from the track and pushed into the thick undergrowth of the heavy timber, uttering a low warning as he sank to his knees, pulling Jessie down after him. I followed his action quickly enough, and, with my eyes on the trail, saw a band of savages glide by. They were in single file, and going with the lope common to the runner, a pace that can be kept up for hours. They passed eastward and away from the fight, moving like shadows.

There had come no cessation of the sound of cannon, and, save for their muffled jar, to us there had been no indication of a battle near. I wondered that the

The Strength of the Weak

wounded had not passed under our ken as they were carried back to the fleet, then knowing nothing of the skirmish, which history has named the "bloody morning scout," and the subsequent demoralization. So far none but Indians had passed, they, as we afterward learned, having refused to fight when it was discovered that a part of their own nation had enlisted with the English. Thicker and thicker they came, always on the run, and we were forced to sit and watch them, the interval between the bands growing less and less frequent. Presently the French began to come, and we remained but half-concealed for hour after hour, not daring to go our way, all the time conscious that something wonderful was in progress, yet without the faintest clew as to facts. That the French had been defeated was so improbable that I did not seriously think of it. If the English had beaten a fair retreat it was quite as much as I dared hope.

All that morning we heard the distant rumble and jar of heavy guns, and it was not until afternoon that we made a fair guess at what had happened. The first that gave us an inkling was a body of white-coated soldiers running as though pursued. I say white-coated, but by that I only mean the French, for not one in ten wore coat of any kind; not one in twenty bore arms. Among them were women, too, coarse in face and limb, with coarser skirts held high as they strode or ran, casting fearful glances behind. These were camp-followers. But soon the mass crowding the way held no women among them, only soldiers—a sweating, swearing, though otherwise silent, jumble of humanity almost filling the rough corduroy road, a steady stream of life flowing north. And borne along were men with faces blotched with blood and black with powder, faces white with faintness or terror, or red with brutal ferocity—officers and men indiscriminately mixed, many

Bloody Pond

stamped with panic, and all with haste. I saw none I knew.

Hardly a glance was turned in our direction. All eyes were on the trampled road that stretched through the forest, a road just here hemmed by bog and swamp, and which each instant was being more and more gorged by the fleeing masses as they struggled by. And yet not all passed. Some tripped and fell, and lay helpless, overcome by exertion and heat. Only twice I marked an incident of man's humanity to his fellow when a refugee stopped to help a comrade, but for the most part each was for himself, and it soon became evident even to us that the French army—the flower of New France and the hope of the kingdom—had been defeated in action, and that defeat had degenerated into rout.

Spaulding had laid his hand on my shoulder to hold me down, and in his excitement his grip had tightened, though I was unconscious of it until I awoke to the pain he was inflicting and found his fingers buried in my flesh. Hardly winking, I looked on the fleeing procession. Men on horseback—mere teamsters—tore along through the packed mass, regardless of where they rode, so that it was ahead, cut traces and broken harness streaming behind them. There were shrieks and calls and curses as the mad riders drove on, and twice I heard shots that told of a coward's ending.

I cannot give in words the horror of the scene. Jessie had buried her face in her hands, I had become dumb, though every fibre in me trembled between hope and indignation and pity as I marked the weak fall and saw them trampled on, while Spaulding, his head reared above the bushes, uttered under his breath exclamation after exclamation.

The press finally became so thick that at last many were forced from the road, and either fell into the water or escaped through and fled into the thickets. Many

The Strength of the Weak

more passed close to us, even seeing us, but giving us no heed, thinking, probably, that we were of them, a self-deception due largely to the military dress I wore. Long before the jam was at its height the sound of guns ceased, or had been smothered in the dull thunder of the rush; and when it at last became plain that the French were in full retreat, and that we were in danger of being overwhelmed by the increasing flood of refugees, we turned ourselves and fled away into the deeper forest.

It was well towards dark when we had regained our camping-place of the night before, and the pond, soon to become one of the horror spots of the world, lay as black as ink in the hollow below us. Though I was all impatience to get forward, we did not move on the next morning. I thought that we might meet the force that had put to flight the French army, and felt that among the English we would find safety, and the darkness of our long-continued peril would vanish. But the voyageur would have none of it, and showed his superior wisdom in insisting that we should remain where we were until the English should have cleared the region of refugees, and passion had abated enough to allow one man to find another's status before he took his life.

For it was doubtless true that upon the day following the bloody battle of Lake George (then so called for the first time) no man was safe from his fellow unless he travelled in company. The sight of a stranger meant a shot, and the rights and wrongs of the act were not looked into too deeply.

Therefore, Spaulding held us close to our bivouac, which was under a shelving rock at the edge of the fire-blasted district, not even venturing abroad himself. We were more than three miles from the road made by the invading and retreating army, and that any considerable number of the French would drift to such a distance

Bloody Pond

from the direct line of flight was undreamed of by any of us. But the undreamed-of events are the ones that generally bear hardest upon humanity, just as our greatest joys break from an unexpected quarter at an unexpected time. It was nigh high noon, and the September sun smote the unshaded hill with all the fervency of mid-August. The little spring by which we had stopped trickled its water into the pool below. Not a ripple marred the mirror of the miniature lake.

We were quietly discussing the future when Spaulding gave the characteristic lift to his hand, and in a moment we beheld a band of French come from the shelter of the trees that almost surrounded the pond. There were two dozen, at least, perhaps more. I never counted them.

Weary enough they were, hatless and coatless, and there might have been half a dozen muskets among them. With one accord they made for the water, every man sinking to his knees and drinking. There was no semblance of order to the party, though some respect was shown the officers among them, inasmuch as the latter held aloof from the common soldiers, and were not molested. The place must have appeared a garden spot to those tired men. To their left rose the blasted hill, across which no enemy could creep unobserved; before them lay the pond, and to the right and behind, the dense virgin forest. This latter did not push itself to the shore at the place where the French had gathered. Betwixt the timber and the pond there stretched a small meadow, one of those natural and beautiful clearings sometimes found in the depths of the most dense wilderness. The late flowers bloomed in the lush grass and a few scattered trees threw their shade athwart the green.

I expected to see the party drink and move on towards the north, but, instead of so doing, almost with one accord they threw themselves on the ground in the

The Strength of the Weak

shade of the trees, the officers by themselves, and rested like men worn out through bodily fatigue. They were at such a distance that by easy aim I might have dropped a rifle-ball in the midst of the group nearest me, but aggressiveness had no place in me then, for the forlorn condition of the band, evidently lost and certainly in desperate straits, merited more of pity than of enmity. I do not know why these people interested us. We had experienced a surfeit of the French, and the mixture of half-clothed and less than half-armed regulars and militia was no threat to us, as we had a position from which we could have withstood their whole number had we been discovered, or had they either the motive or spirit to attack us. But we peered over the little rampart that protected us and looked at them, as though in expectancy even when we expected nothing. I noticed they lacked either the foresight or the spirit to place a sentinel, and perhaps it would have made no difference in the end. At all events, there was no provision against surprise.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE MASSACRE

GRADUALLY movement among them ceased. Some lay along the grass and slept, some sat, chins down and arms clasped, as though in utter dejection and weariness of body and brain. Only one man was on his feet, and he, with a musket, stood near the tree under which the officers were gathered.

I had turned to whisper something to Spaulding when a shot broke the brooding silence. It was evidently a signal, for a volley followed, and from the woods behind the refugees I saw little bunches of smoke spring into sight and hang in the still air, then some two-score of men rushed into the clearing and charged on the well-nigh defenceless French. The effect of the first fire had been to kill or wound nearly a third of the refugees and throw the rest into a panic. One or two shots were returned, but nothing in the way of organized resistance met the English as they rushed on to the grassy level. As though there had been an explosion among them, the surviving French fled in all directions, the majority making for the woods to the left, though I marked three officers and a man run on to the burned clearing, up the hill, and directly towards us, as though in our direction lay greater safety. In the ensuing confusion half a dozen threw themselves into the shallow pool and essayed to swim across it, but every one of them was shot ere he had made ten strokes. I saw defenceless men sink on their knees and hold up their

The Strength of the Weak

clasped hands in useless supplication. No quarter was shown, no prisoners taken in this something less than five minutes' action.

I saw this conscienceless slaughter more in its entirety than in detail, and am at a loss for a great deal that took place near the water's edge, a loss I am glad to sustain, for the horrors of the massacre at Bloody Pond were appalling. Within the time it has taken to describe the foregoing scene I do not believe there was a living Frenchman left, save the four who were toiling through the burned timbers and up the hill in the hope of reaching the forest at the edge of which we lay. For the most part, they had thrown aside everything that could hamper their flight, though among them I saw one officer, hatless and coatless, who still clung to his sword as though life or honour depended upon its retention. They were more than half-way up the hill, and, with a natural instinct for fair play, I was hoping they would escape, when they were sighted by the victorious English, and a dozen men turned their attention to them, running out and deliberately kneeling to shoot, as though the flying wretches were so much game. The first shot failed, the ball going perilously near us as we lay in the line of fire, but the second went home, for an officer fell. Another dropped under the unerring aim of his murderer, and, as he pitched headlong, the remaining officer turned at right angles to his course, and made for cover across the hill; a wise move, for though the forest was a trifle farther, he could more than make up in speed what he lost in distance. The common soldier, who had been running with him almost elbow to elbow, still continued up the hill.

Nearer and nearer he drew, aiming at the covert in which we were hidden, and as he came to within twenty paces my thumping heart gave a great bound, for I recognised him as the deserter who, when I had last

The Massacre

seen him, lay bound in the cottage at La Chevelure. His face was aflame with terror and exertion, his light eyes almost bursting from their sockets. A bloody bandage crossed his forehead, and his hair, unloosed from its queue, streamed out from his hatless head. I will never forget the picture he made as he hurried up the slope. Were I an artist I could, even to-day, paint the man in detail, the horror of death in his eye and gaping mouth. Years cannot efface him from my memory.

As he came close I forgot time, place, and risk, and, without a notion of my own object in so doing, leaped to the top of the little rampart behind which we were crouching. Rifle in hand, I raised my arms above my head and shouted I know not what. He stopped short as he saw me, and that he knew me is past doubt, for he glared at me as though he had seen a ghost, then, for the first time seeming to notice that he was alone, swung from his track and made for the point towards which the officer was aiming. A second would have compassed the length of his halt, but the momentary hesitation was fatal. He had barely started on when a ball hit him and he fell, rolling a little distance down the hill, then, gathering himself, sat up and looked stupidly about. I turned my attention towards the flying officer, apparently the only unharmed survivor of the bloody and merciless attack. He had almost gained the cover of the forest when, in quick succession, I heard the cracks of three rifles. That the fugitive was hit became certain, for he went to his knees, but, struggling up, again gamely continued on his way, and, with speed scarcely lessened, plunged into the woods.

The horror of the tragedy I had witnessed did not appeal to me at the time, nor did I think of the possible consequence of my impulsive act. Had I stopped to consider I would have seen that I had brought danger to my own party by exposing its position, a danger not

The Strength of the Weak

lessened by my own hated costume. What I might have done had I been alone is past saying, but the matter was settled for me by Spaulding, who, with the cry, "Good God! Chatsworth, what have ye done?" laid hold of my collar just as I marked a party of the English swing their arms and start up the hill towards us, and, as though I was of small account and of no weight, he flung me backward, where I went headlong to the ground.

The stunning effect of the fall, slight though it was, bewildered me, though it did nothing more, unless, indeed, it furnished me with wit for the future. I indistinctly remember seeing the voyageur, with something white tied to his ramrod, standing on the spot whence I had been thrown, violently waving his flag of truce. I distinctly remember the cry Jessie gave as she sprang towards me, and the great pity in her face; but when I had mastered my brain again four or five men were among us, and I was pulled to my feet by no less a personage than Colonel Rogers.

CHAPTER XLIV

I WIN

I THINK the joy of finding myself among friends went far towards making me forgive the circumstance of their coming. That all moral qualities were not lost to the chief actors in the so-called "incident" of Bloody Pond was shown in the tenderness towards us of the colonel and his men. Nor were they without human justification for their relentless attack. Of the forty colonists who had descended on the unsuspecting band less than half belonged to the Rangers, and all had been instigated by the acts of terrible cruelty perpetrated by the French.

For during the early morning of the previous day it had gone hard with the English when Williams lost the field and his life at West Mountain, though Nemesis had overtaken the victors when later, flushed with triumph, they had attacked Johnson, who was in hastily improvised defences at the head of the lake. The French had been inhuman in their treatment of the wounded on the earlier field, and when the later battle of Lake George had been fairly won by the English bands of men were despatched in all directions to exterminate the fugitives. One does not look for justice in war, nor for mercy for mercy's sake, much less for the broader charity that absorbs and kills the spirit of vengeance. There was little softness in me for the moment as we heard an account of the greatest action that had, as yet, taken place on American soil. We

The Strength of the Weak

learned that the peppery Count Dieskau had been taken prisoner and wounded by the man to whom he surrendered, and, though I heard that many of his staff had been killed, I could get no information concerning any one that answered to the description of my old enemy. I thought that possibly he had fallen in a duel with Meltonne or been reduced in rank and returned to Canada, but my guesses happened to be far astray from the truth.

While Rogers was giving us a short and hurried narrative of the French invasion and its consequences, I heard distant shots and the shouts of those who were beating up the woods for a chance refugee. Below, the bodies of the slain were being thrown into the pond.

After explaining his apparent desertion of us while we were in the hut, telling of his orders and his vain efforts to induce Johnson to move in our behalf, the colonel started to join his command, which was gathering about the pond, coming in from the woods in all directions. We broke our little camp and went too, for the first time free of the lurking fear of either Frenchman or Indian. Then I told Spaulding of the man I had recognised, but which, it appeared, he had not, for when he heard it was the deserter he pricked up his ears and remarked that "the devil himself, the man's master," could not be far away.

The soldier was lying where he had finally rested after his roll down the hill, having fallen from his sitting position. As we came up to him he begged piteously for water, and prayed, with feebly clasped hands, that we would not kill him outright. He was in little danger from me, for the look in his death-stricken face might have softened the heart of an incarnate monster.

"Oh, m'sieur, m'sieur," he pleaded, rolling his eyes in my direction, "let me not go without a priest! I cannot die alone in the bare field. You live—you live, and I——"

I Win

"Where is your master the count?" demanded Spaulding, something like pity showing on his face; and I repeated the question, as I saw the fellow would be incapable of speaking ere Rogers could send back the water he had hurried for. The man threw his hands above his head, and for an instant looked distraught, then, struggling with his failing senses, fairly screamed:

"The count! But I could not follow him! He did not fall! Oh, I am miserable! O God—m'sieur—do not let me die here! Forgive me, and in the name of the Virgin do something for me. Do something for me. I cannot die! I must not die!"

His face took on a look of horror that was appalling. It was as though hell had opened before him, and blood trickled from his mouth. I quailed at his anguish, but shouted back:

"The count—the count, man! Where did you last see him?"

His breast gave a great heave, and, with his remaining strength, he lifted his hand and pointed towards the spot in the woods where I had seen the officer disappear, then he fell back with his eyes fixed and open as though something wonderful had crossed his vision.

I leaped to my feet at the sudden realization that the officer I had watched was probably my old enemy, but Spaulding made no move, still holding his hand where he had placed it on the heart of the dying man.

"Poor beast," he said, "his life but hangs on minutes, and the sight is but a sorry one for the lass. Stay by him to the end if ye like. He asked it, an' 'twould be but charity. As for the count, the man doubtless wanders. I would get the girl away from these things."

Jessie looked at me appealingly as her brother rose and stepped to her side, but I shook my head and again

The Strength of the Weak

stooped over the deserter, for I hoped to get more from the poor wretch before he passed away.

But in this I was disappointed, for though the lamp flickered for fully a quarter of an hour, and he twice essayed to speak, failing each time, he finally gave a shudder and so died.

I did not waste much sympathy over the poor body. As I turned away I noticed the field was being rapidly cleared, the black water of the pond swallowing in one common grave the dead, and even those with life not yet extinct, though of the latter fact I then knew nothing. The voyageur and his sister were remote from the field, for I could see them seated beneath a tree on the edge of the opposite woods.

But I did not join them. An overwhelming desire to seek for the wounded officer whom I believed to be De Mantel came over me, and with a quickening pulse I picked up my rifle, and, turning my back on the clearing, made directly for the point where I had seen him disappear. Clad as I was it was a foolish thing to do, for the English were yet ranging through the woods, and their sight of me would have meant scant courtesy in the shape of a bullet.

For a long time I searched, and searched in vain, then came to the uneasy belief that the man still lived to be a possible menace. I had about given him up when I almost fell over his body, where he lay in a dense thicket nearly a quarter of a mile from where he had entered the forest. He was propped against a tree, and his face was the colour of chalk. At first I thought I had stumbled across a stranger, for his beard and moustache were gone, but the old fold of rigid muscle that ran along his set jaws, as well as the scarlet line of scar that marked my sword-thrust, undeceived me.

For the rest he was the same, save that he was coatless and hatless, and his once immaculate shirt showed

I Win

what he had gone through. His white breeches were scarlet with blood. I had come face to face again with the only man I have ever hated, but whom, thank God, I hate no longer, even in memory. But for the sword lying at his side I saw no arm, nor above his waist as he sat no sign of wound.

A quick glint came to his undimmed violet eye as he saw and recognised me, a look that was a mixture of surprise, apprehension, and anger. I have come suddenly upon a trapped wolf and seen him bear the same expression.

I was stricken dumb by the unexpected sight, and, through sheer instinct, covered him with my rifle. He shifted his hand to his breast as though equally startled, as no doubt he was, but he made no further move, and, believing him harmless at last, I lowered my weapon.

"Well, m'sieur," he said, as easily as though we had parted but a few minutes before, "the devil has been your guide; you can finish it out with little risk. It would be a noble revenge."

"Captain de Mantel!" I exclaimed.

"The Count de Lune, M'sieur Chatsworth."

I breathed hard.

"Where were you hit?" I asked.

"In both legs, m'sieur. The blood is slowly going. Hell will be merry by sunset."

I sat down on a rock near him and gazed at the once powerful and now helpless man, my heart beating more quickly than his, I'll warrant. Will my reader think me weak, or believe me when I say that at that moment I held no more resentment towards him than though he had never wronged me. Nay, then, it was not weakness, or, if so, it was the sort for which I thank God. He returned my look with the old scowl on his brow, his long violet eye scanning me from head to foot.

"You have won," he said at last. "You look to

The Strength of the Weak

have suffered something yourself. Have you the courage you lacked at one of our meetings? You might ease my misery and avenge yourself at once. Do you not see I am helpless?"

"I have suffered much, but do you take me for a brute, M'sieur de Mantel?"

"Count de Lune and Seigneur de Mantel, M'sieur Chatsworth. I have corrected you many times; you are stupid. No, not a brute; not even do you possess the qualities that go to make a man."

"The Count de Lune, if you wish. You cannot irritate me, m'sieur."

"I would to God I could. Your triumph, M'sieur Provinciale, is not of your own strength. Did I but think so I would not relish heaven were it open to me."

"M'sieur count," I said, "ours has been the strength of the weak. It has prevailed over the strength of the mighty. There is a power greater than——"

"Curse your homilies. Fortune favoured you and you slipped from me. So much I admit, no more. What has become of—of mademoiselle?"

"She is with us, m'sieur."

"And safe?"

"And well content, m'sieur."

"Ah! Has the callow youth been making shepherd's love to the callow maiden?"

My blood leaped at the insult, and for the life of me I could not help answering.

"I have won there, too, m'sieur," I said, softly.

The ridge came sharply across his jaw and his clinched teeth did not open.

"Can you be moved, m'sieur?" I asked.

"Nay, I cannot. But I would have you move. Curse me not with your winnings, nor sit there delighting yourself. Thou crow, to watch and croak. Turn your back or be off."

I Win

"I can neither curse nor croak, m'sieur, but, believe me, I will do anything that in reason you may command. I can now realize that you will trouble me no more. I will not outrage myself by hating you or doing the evil you have done yourself and me."

"As hell is before me!" he exclaimed, feebly.

"Can I do anything, m'sieur?"

"Curse thee! Doubly curse thee! Yes. You may get me water, and then if you will curse me back we will be nearer quits. Water—water, I tell thee! I will use your weakness since I cannot use your strength."

It was useless and worse to cross words with him while in that mood, and it was plain that my presence made him writhe like a scorched snake. It was easy to understand the reason. There was small charity in goading him into blasphemy, so I determined to go for water and fetch the voyageur, hoping that on my return his spirit might be softened, for, as God is my witness, I could ill bear to think of him as he was, and would have had him live could I have been assured of immunity from his hatred.

I turned away and went some ten paces, drawing my knife and blazing a tree that I might locate him again. I had barely completed the mark when I heard a loud report behind me, and a bullet cut my temple with the feeling of a cold iron laid across the flesh, and buried itself in the bark. I swung around, mightily startled. De Mantel still sat in the same position, but in his right hand was a smoking pistol, and his strong, white teeth showed through the devilish smile that spread his lips. He laughed aloud as he cast aside the empty weapon and thrust his hand into his open shirt, but ere he had half-drawn the second fire-arm there concealed, there came another ringing report from a little distance and the hand fell. With it his head

The Strength of the Weak

drooped forward, and at the same moment Spaulding came crashing through the underbrush.

"Mighty king!" exclaimed the voyageur, as he looked at the blood streaming down my face. "Do ye lack the brains o' a kitten that ye go prowling through the woods at this time, an' the badge o' France marked all over ye? God be thanked it came to me what ye were up to when I saw ye breaking for the timber. By the Lord, 'tis the count!"

He stepped to the prostrate man.

"Aye," I said, with a feeling of awe creeping over me as I realized my narrow escape, "and may the Lord forgive him his treachery."

"I fear me the Lord had little to do with the making o' such a spirit, lad, an' I fear ye will never make a woodsman. But the devil is not dead!" he exclaimed. "Like a snake's tail, he bids fair to wag on till sunset."

And, indeed, the wretch was not yet gone. We stretched him out on the grass, his eyes showing life and intelligence as he glared balefully at us both. But he never spoke or moved again, for the voyageur's timely shot had struck him in the throat. He faded slowly, however, and it was something like an hour ere his set jaw fell and the violet blue of his eyes glazed forever.

CHAPTER XLV

CONCLUSION

CONSIDERING what the man had been to me it is perhaps strange that I had no feeling of exultation as I finally turned away with Spaulding and made for out of the woods. Relief I certainly felt, but I felt more strongly a spirit of thankfulness to Him who had so strangely guided us through a wilderness of dangers. I knew then how I had feared the man who had come so nigh to ruining me (then the ruin appeared complete), but the fear had vanished. It was as though a weight long hampering me had been suddenly lifted.

We made no pretence at either interment or even concealment of the body, leaving the stark figure on the grass a prey to the wolves. I think that of those who fell during the fight (and I believe there were no escapes) the body of Armand de Mantel, the Count de Lune, was the only one that missed burial in the black waters of Bloody Pond. Nothing was taken from him but his sword, and that I still possess.

Even the remains of his servant had been carried away when we returned, and by the time we reached the level of the pond the water looked as though it was reflecting the lurid glow of a sullen sunset. It was dark crimson, stained with the blood that had been poured into it, a fact that gave the pool its sinister title.

The ground had been cleared of every trace of the fight, save here and there some of the jetsam thrown aside by the panic-stricken French. The colonel was

The Strength of the Weak

talking to Jessie, who now sat under the tree that had once sheltered the officers of the slaughtered refugees. As we came up to them, I leaning on the voyageur's arm, for my loss of blood had been constant and was beginning to weaken me, the maiden turned and saw us. For one instant she looked at my bleached face and uncovered wound, her eyes growing great with horror; then, with a low cry, she rushed forward, ignoring her brother and all witnesses, threw both her beautiful arms about me, and laid her lips to mine.

The voyageur dropped my arm and stepped aside, the widest of wide-eyed surprise showing on his bronzed face.

"Hoity toity, lass! Has yer modesty gone mad?" he asked, with a frown.

Jessie seemed to realize what she had done, for she slid from my embrace and ran to her brother, making no more answer than to seize him by the arm with both hands and apparently tell her story with her beautiful eyes alone, for she only looked in his face, and uttered not a word.

"Faith," said Rogers, "I myself would stand a deeper cut, an' without winkin', for the like o' that salve. Who favoured ye with the gash, lad? Two hours since ye were sound o' head if not o' heart."

"Is it even so, my girl?" said the voyageur, holding his sister away from him and putting back her hair with one great hand as he read her face. "Faith, I thought I saw something of the kind days since, but—but, lass, were it not better that the man an' not the maid should set the pace? Chatsworth," he continued, his brow knitting, "perhaps I have been wrong in letting ye into temptation, but when tampered ye with my jewel? Why have ye shot from ambush? See what ye have done!"

I was weak enough by this, and would willingly have

Conclusion

sat down, but I steadied myself by my rifle and answered:

"At least I have done no wrong. If there is a fault here it is indeed yours more than mine. Am I to find sight for a mole? Did you take me for a man of wood and not to be moved into loving Jessie? And you have nothing to regret. I have bound myself to your sister and she to me. Have you aught against me? I am too weak for more at present."

"Well, ye be plainly too strong for me, lad. Worse luck, I know little o' the landmarks o' love, but 'tis hard that I spend five years o' my life an' lose my best friend in behalf o' the lass only to turn her over to ye ere we be fairly out o' the woods. I'll talk o' this later. Colonel, have ye any in the shape o' a leech among yer men? The lad is losin' much blood and the lass is white with fright for him. Lord, Lord, I had little thought that we had the blind god on our trail the while!"

"'Tis a parson instead o' a pill-twister that they both want," said Rogers, his hawklike face breaking into a broad smile. "Leave lad and lass together, an' I'll warrant the colour will come to the face o' the girl an' the wound knit. 'Tis but a deep scratch at worst. Faith, friend, would ye mend the lad's head and then split both hearts? The matter is beyond all of us, man; an' I'm right glad, God knows, to see so fair an' ending to so foul a day."

In playful earnestness he grasped the voyageur by the collar and bore him off, talking volubly and laughing loudly between his words.

And I, with the curse of hate set on one hand and the golden planet rising on the other, fell into such a happy mood that I was scarce myself. How my wound was cleansed and bound I hardly remember, nor care to, since I well recollect the joy that was mine as my love tended me. And she—well, she made no pretence

The Strength of the Weak

at coyness, for she was not born with the shallow soul of a coquette, but was a woman, pure and loving and beautiful, as God meant women to be.

We camped that night high on the hill that we might be removed from the red sepulchre in the hollow, and the next morning, with no prisoners and no wounded (for Rogers's force had not lost a man), but with a story that has blotted the page of history, we took up our march for Johnson's position on the lake ten miles away. We met many evidences of the horrors of the retreat, and little we dreamed that almost upon the ground we were treading Montcalm would soon exact a bloody reprisal for the defeat of his countrymen. But of this I have nothing to say at present.

Nor, indeed, have I much more to say to any purpose. Johnson, made irritable by the wound he had received, yet lifted into undue greatness by the triumph which he never fairly shared with Lyman, who proved to be the real hero of the day, received me graciously enough, and promised many things he afterward forgot, being soon weighed down with a newly acquired title. He sent us to Albany, however, under escort of the guard that went south with the wounded and chagrined baron. That gentleman pretended never to have seen me, but as intently as the pain of his wound would permit, he listened to me as I tried to refresh his memory, and ended by telling him of the death of his aide. He informed me of the resignation of Meltonne, and promised to look into my affairs; but when I made it plain that I had no need of his services at that late day, he dismissed me with a wave of his pudgy hand, and I never saw him after. His wound proved fatal.

Spaulding immediately joined the army as one of the Rangers under Rogers, and of him perhaps more some day. Before he mustered in he went to Dummerston, and there I wooed the maid again. I married

Conclusion

then, and, when the call came, joined the army, and when Quebec fell—even that very day—I met my mother, who had mourned within its walls for well-nigh four long years.

I never went to the old seigneury again, nor did I ever have a longing to visit it. When peace came the estate was confirmed to me, but I promptly sold it, and with my mother, and, God bless her, my wife, I went far afield.

How the great green woods bend and wave in the wind, beckoning my memory back to the brave days of old when friendship was fast and true, and life but loving, and love my loadstar! Aye, and love is yet, though life's shadows have grown long and point east, for the sun is very low.

THE END

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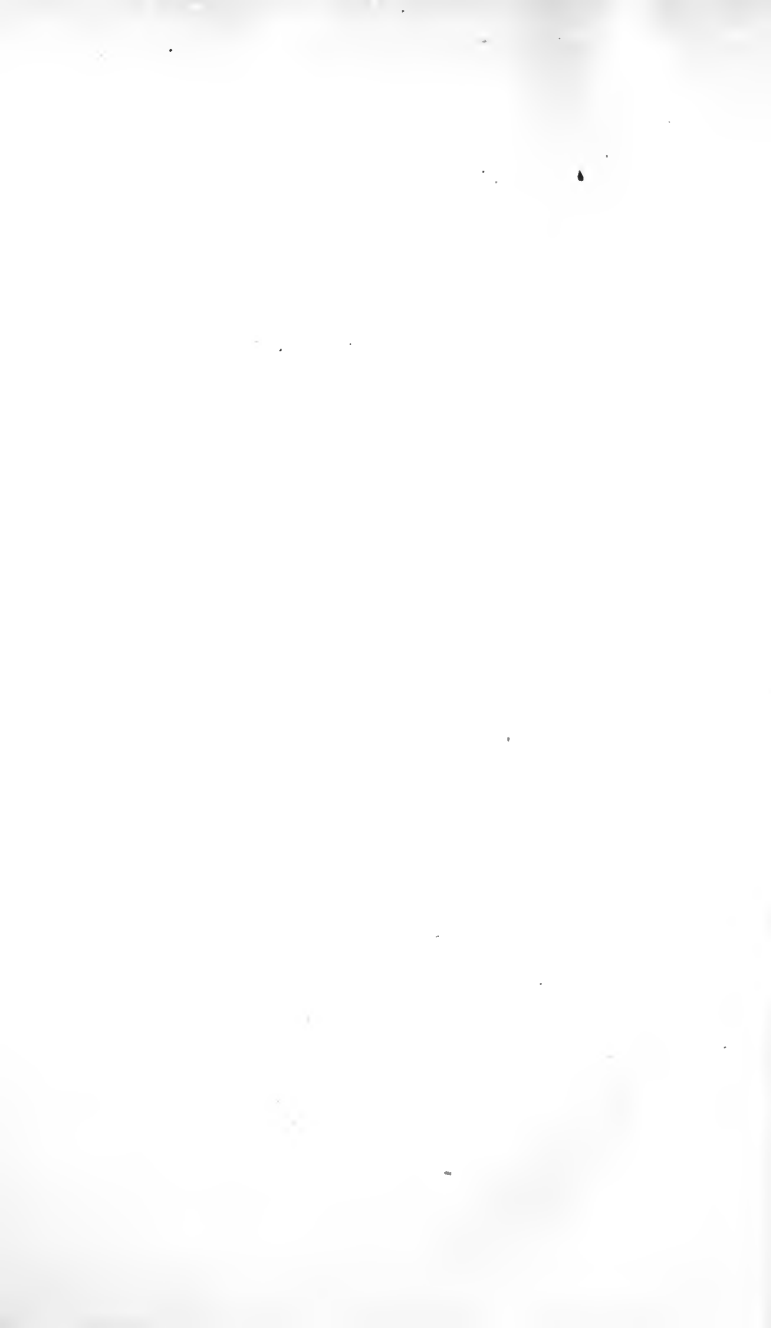
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